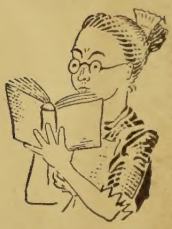
HEIRS APPARENT

PHILIP GIBBS



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HEIRS APPARENT

PHILIP GIBBS

By SIR PHILIP GIBBS

THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD
THE STREET OF ADVENTURE
WOUNDED SOULS
PEOPLE OF DESTINY
THE SOUL OF THE WAR
THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME
THE STRUGGLE IN FLANDERS
THE WAY TO VICTORY, 2 *Vols.*
NOW IT CAN BE TOLD
MORE THAT MUST BE TOLD

HEIRS APPARENT

BY

PHILIP GIBBS

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I

JULIAN PERRYAM was awakened at nine o'clock on a May morning in his bedroom in the Turl, off Broad Street, Oxford. He desired to sleep longer—hours longer—years longer—after a somewhat hectic night which had ended—how the deuce had it ended? He tried to think, as he flung one arm over the bedclothes and stared for a moment at the stream of sunlight pouring through his chintz window blind. . . . Clatworthy's twenty-first birthday . . . Maidenhead . . . That fool Clatworthy had started being rowdy some time before eleven, playing monkey tricks in the style of Leslie Henson, as he was pleased to imagine. The waiters had threatened to chuck him out when he hung onto the chandelier and had the damned thing down with a most unholy smash. So childish, all that! Oxford was nothing but a kindergarten. He had certainly been unwell. Went giddy, all of a sudden. Clatworthy's poisonous cocktails had done that. He had gone behind the bar and mixed them himself. Audrey had become queer too. She had clung to his arm when he danced with her and said, "I'm feeling frightfully amused, Julian, but I'm not quite sure of my stance. Tell me if there are any bunkers coming. . . ." They had motored back from Maidenhead in somebody's Daimler. Then he had seen her home, or something. Yes, he remembered walking arm in arm with her up St. Giles to Somerville. Oh, Lord, yes! He had given her a leg up, so that she could get into a window. She had stood on his shoulder and scrambled in somehow. She had certainly got in all right. He had heard another smash almost as bad as Clatworthy and the chandelier, and a girl's scream of fright,

and Audrey's squeals of laughter. After that? How had he got in? He had been progged at the corner of Carfax. "Your name please!" "Julian Perryam—spelt with a y." He was rather proud of that. "Spelt with a y." He had kept quite cool. "College?" "Balliol, of course." That "of course" was pretty good too. Nothing like being a bit haughty with such silly swine. How childish it all was! Oxford "men" and treated like naughty schoolboys. He was fed up with the whole institution. Utter waste of time. Stultifying to the intellect.

"Oh, shut up, for God's sake!"

It was that licensed ass Prichard singing as he shaved, as usual. He couldn't let a fellow sleep. He was one of those aggressively active and healthy persons who like getting up early—positively liked it!—and made things intolerable for any man who shared rooms with him.

"'If you're waking, call me early,
Call me early, mother dear. . . .'

"Oh, Hell, I've lost my stud!"

"Shut up!" shouted Julian Perryam, raising himself in bed slightly so that his voice should carry through the door.

"'For I'm to be Queen of the May, mother,
For I'm to be Queen of the May.'"

"Shut up!"

So far from shutting up, Stokes Prichard opened Julian's door and stood there brushing his ridiculously golden hair with silver-backed brushes, in a vigorous athletic style.

"Good morning, darling! Had a good night, little one? Pure and pleasant dreams?

"'There's a woman like a dewdrop, she's so purer than the purest,
And her heart's the noblest, yes, and her sure faith's the surest:
And her eyes are dark and humid like the depth on depth of lustre . . . !'

. . . Can you lend me a back stud, duckie? My last, I fear, has rolled down to the uttermost pits."

"Help yourself," said Julian sulkily. "Then be good enough to clear out and let me sleep, there's a good chap."

"Oh, no, dear heart. Not sleep again.

> *"'To sleep! perchance to dream; ay, there's the rub;*
> *For in that sleep of death what dreams may come*
> *When we have shuffled off this mortal coil*
> *Must give us pause.' . . .*

. . . Which drawer, darling?"

"Left hand side, top," said Julian.

Stokes Prichard rummaged in it, ruthless with regard to an admirable assortment of silk ties, and produced a stud.

"A noble lad i' faith. 'Twill serve my purpose well. . . . And by the bye, Perryam, my old college chum and playmate of my innocent youth, there's a letter for you from old Scrutton. I recognise his meticulous and sinister hand. I fear it conveys bad tidings to you. This is the fourth time you've been progged in the last fortnight. I have a dreadful foreboding that this time you'll be sent down without the option of a fine. *'Hodie tibi, cras mihi,'* which, as you doubtless do not understand the ancient tongue, means 'Your turn to-day, mine to-morrow,' O Brutus!"

Julian Perryam leaned higher on one elbow and lit a cigarette.

"I expect you're right," he answered coldly, "but as it happens I'm going to save them the trouble. I'm sending myself down. To-day."

Stokes Prichard permitted himself a look of surprise and stopped brushing his hair.

"Not really?"

"Yes. I'm fed up with Oxford. There's nothing in it—for me. I'm not one of you ruddy athletes, all brawn and no brains. And I've no further interest in the life and letters of Erasmus, the economic conditions of England at the time of the Black Death, and the political issues of the Thirty Years' War. It's a bit stale after our own late little strife. Also I'm not really amused by dances at the Masonic, afternoon tea at the Clarendon, and insincere debates at the

Union by a clique of conceited pups. Anyhow I'm chucking it."

"What will your people say?"

Julian shrugged his shoulders in his pink silk pyjamas.

"Why should they say anything?"

Stokes Prichard laughed in his sunny way and did a little imaginary dumbell exercise, counting as he raised and lowered his arms.

"Far be it from me to dissuade my young friend (one two, one two). I certainly agree with a man being master of his own destiny (three four, three four, and touch the tips of your toes). All the same, little one, it seems a pity to go down at the beginning of Summer term when Oxford is really brightening up. Of course there *is* that letter from Scrutton. Don't you think you'd better read it?"

"Sling it over," said Perryam.

Prichard condescended to bring the letter, and Perryam tore open the envelope and glanced at the lines inside.

"Yes. It looks like a row all right. Well, they shan't put their pomposity over me. I shall motor up to town this afternoon."

Stokes Prichard read the note and whistled softly.

"Oh, a very stern little summons! Most unfriendly. Well, give my love to London, old dear. I'll join you there soon. My last term you know. After that—Life! Also, alas, a little labour. I shall have to earn my own living, and to dig I am unable, to beg I am ashamed. A tragic prospect for a young English gentleman of poor but honest parents. Still there's always Love! . . .

"'She whom I love is hard to catch and conquer,
Hard, but oh, the glory of the winning were she won!' . . ."

He retired into his own room and presently departed to the Anglo-American club, not because he loved Americans particularly but because he liked big breakfasts and found the best assortment of early morning food in that institution.

Julian Perryam slept again.

II

HE met Audrey Nye at Fuller's in the Cornmarket, where he proposed to have a light lunch. One could have excellent salmon mayonnaise and ice-cream sodas. Audrey looked a little pale under her Tudor cap, but otherwise cheerful.

"Hullo!" she greeted him. "How do you feel this morning? Shall we share a table?"

"Here's one," said Julian. "Shall I throw your gown over the peg?"

Audrey sat down and regarded the menu card.

"Light food for me this morning," she remarked. "*Very* light food."

She waved the menu at two Somerville girls who came in. They laughed at her as though aware of some good jest, and took a table by the window.

"Any news?" asked Julian casually.

"Quite a lot," answered Audrey. She gave a queer little catch in her breath and then said, "I've been sent down!"

Julian glanced at her over the menu card and raised his eyebrows.

"Is that so? About last night?"

"Yes. Rotten bad luck. When I went through the window —you remember?—I stepped on Beatrice Tuck's dressing-table. You know what sort of a thing she is, and what sort of a dressing-table she *would* have. Absolutely laden with scent bottles, powder pots, lip salves, face creams, hair washes. They all went down like an avalanche—enough to waken the dead! Then as I jumped I trod on Beatrice Tuck's face. Needless to say I didn't do it deliberately. Any decent girl would understand that. But the Tuck creature says I damaged her nose—such a nose too! and gave the whole game away to the Principal! Treachery, I call it. However, there it is. I'm sent down."

"Bad luck," said Julian. "What are you going to eat?"

They chose salmon mayonnaise. They nearly always did. Towards the end of the meal Audrey suggested that Julian should pay for her lunch, if he didn't mind. She had had to pay up some outstanding debts, and had just enough in her purse to get back to her father's vicarage at Hartland.

"Near Guildford," said Julian. "I forgot your governor was vicar there. My people are living at Gorse Hill, which is not far away. I'll motor you back if you like."

"If I like!"

Audrey's brown eyes lighted up and then became overcast with the shadow of a doubt.

"How can you? At the beginning of the term?"

"That's easy," said Julian. "I'm going down too, this afternoon."

"What, you too? Sent down? No!"

She gave a little gasp.

"Not exactly," said Julian. "I'm sending myself down, though it amounts to the same thing. As a great scholar remarked this morning, with a slight inaccuracy of quotation, *'Hodie tibi, cras mihi*—your turn to-day, mine to-morrow.'"

"Thanks," said Audrey, "I understood first time."

After this assertion of scholarship she looked rather worried and glanced anxiously at Julian.

"I hope our little binge last night didn't put the lid on your career? It was my fault mostly."

"Not at all," said Julian. "It was Clatworthy who lured us into sin. Anyhow he paid for the party, and it must have been pretty expensive."

"Very," answered Audrey. "That chandelier cost him twenty pounds. Last night he thought it was worth it—the jolly old smash!"

She gave a little squeal of laughter at the reminiscence and then asked, "What about your career, Julian? I should be sorry if I thought I'd helped to blast it."

Julian reassured her.

"On the contrary. So far from blasting it, or putting the lid on, you've helped to take the lid off. I'm sick of wasting

time in this City of Beautiful Nonsense. Oxford! Oh, Lord! . . . I think I'll have a look at real life, after a bit."

"You won't like it," said Audrey, rather grimly.

Julian lifted his eyebrows. It was a trick of his to show mild surprise, which was never more than he permitted himself in any crisis or at any statement. Then a faint smile of amusement softened the line of his lips.

"You think it's as bad as that? Oh, well, I daresay you're right! May as well have a dash at it though. What time are you starting this afternoon?"

Audrey was ready to start at any time. She was taking no more than a hand bag. All her things were being sent after her.

"Make it two-fifteen," said Julian. "Outside the Clarry. That's where I stable my car."

Audrey agreed upon the time and cheered herself up—she needed cheering a little—by a valiant attempt at optimism.

"Well, anyhow it's a nice day for a funeral, and the country's looking lovely!"

III

EVERYTHING went according to programme as far as the outskirts of Nuneham Courtenay. Julian had instructed the landlord of his rooms to auction a few bits of furniture and pay himself what was due for the lodgings out of the proceeds. There would be a bit over, which he could keep. Clatworthy looked in, very merry and bright because there had not been a whisper about the affair last night as far as he was concerned. He had been fined, of course, for getting into college after midnight. He still maintained that the twenty pounds he had had to pay for the chandelier was not too much for a priceless thrill.

"It fell down like the Crystal Palace, old man! I was buried in glittering gobbets of early Victorian glass. And the surprise of the thing! When I swung from it gracefully like an anthropoid ape in his native haunts, I had a sense of happy certainty that was suddenly shattered by that colossal crash!"

Clatworthy was a little fellow who made an excellent cox, and he had a gift of facial expression which made him very popular in hall, where he set the whole table laughing by his imitations of Queen Victoria, Nelson, old Scrutton, and various animals, including the favourite performance of a monkey scratching himself. He was the Honourable John Clatworthy, but that didn't matter.

Julian was rather severe with him.

"Of course, you behaved as usual like a gibbering idiot. Those cocktails of yours might have poisoned the whole crowd of us."

"My dear fellow, they're marvellous! I learned them from my eldest brother, who learned them from a fellow at G. H. Q. in the late unmentionable War."

He was genuinely sorry that Julian was going down. However as it was his own last term, they might run up against each other in Town.

"Look me up in South Audley Street, old man. It might save me from suicide. My governor is the gloomiest old beaver that ever sat in the House of Lords. Thinks the country is doomed unless it destroys socialism root and branch and puts a bounty on beet-root sugar."

After his farewell Julian flung a few things into a kit-bag —razor, hair brushes, his favourite ties, pyjamas, socks, and photographs of girls at Somerville, Lady Margaret's and Cherwell Edge—not that he cared for them, but it was hardly the thing to leave them behind. He gave a glance or two round the room and then out of the window from which he could see the tower of Balliol and the rookery in the high trees above the quad.

"Well, that's finished!" he said aloud, and for a moment there was a thoughtful look in his eyes and a half regretful smile. That was all he allowed to the sentiment of the moment. He had had a good time, after all. Probably he would look back to Oxford as the most amusing period of his life. He had made some friends, written some rather decent verse in the *Isis,* had a considerable amount of good fun. But he had become restless lately, with a fed-up feeling, peeved with everything and everybody. It had led him to play the fool overmuch, through sheer boredom. He had been getting damnably into debt, drinking too many cocktails, rotting himself up with the rowdy set. Well . . .

He gave a fiver to the college porter, and then bumped up against Stokes Prichard and two other fellows at the corner of Carfax. They were carrying golf clubs and wheeling bicycles.

"Hullo! Stealing away like a thief in the night?"

Prichard gripped Julian's arm and said, "See you in town one day, old son," and refrained from breaking into verse.

Julian was glad to get away without a fuss. Audrey was waiting outside the Clarendon, no longer in a Tudor cap but with a small blue hat tied round her chin with a veil.

"Up to time, you see," she remarked cheerfully.

Julian nodded and fetched out his car. It was a four-seater Metallurgique which his father had given him last birthday. He had smashed it up in the crossroads at Wood-

stock and had all but broken his neck in it, to say nothing of Clatworthy's vertebræ, on a wild drive back after doing a theatre in Town. However it seemed as good as new now, and if there was one thing on earth he could do, it was drive a car.

"Sit behind like a lady, or next to the driver?" he asked Audrey.

She chose to sit next to him after throwing her hand bag onto the seat behind.

"We ought to do it in three hours easy," said Julian, putting the clutch in.

They swung round by Carfax, narrowly escaping a fellow on an "Indian," and made for the Henley Road. The Metallurgique was pulling fairly well. A bit cold perhaps. Julian listened to the beat of his engine. He would show Audrey a bit of speed presently.

She sat very quiet until they were in the outskirts of Oxford. Then she squirmed round in her seat for a last look at its spires and towers and said, "Good-bye, Oxford!"

"Feeling mushy about it?" asked Julian.

"Just a bit. I've had a glorious time. The best ever!"

She blew her nose with what Julian thought was unnecessary vigour.

He showed her a bit of speed on the road to Nuneham Courtenay. But not as much as he wanted. The Metallurgique was not pulling so well as he hoped. There was a queer kind of rattle in the engine. It was that child Clatworthy's doing. He had lent it to him a night or two ago for a party up at Boar's Hill. He had probably made it jump ditches or something. Treated it like a kangaroo or a tank!

"Curse!"

"What's the matter?" asked Audrey.

Julian didn't answer for a couple of minutes. Then the Metallurgique made strange noises under the bonnet, rattled like a tin can tied to a dog's tail, mis-fired terribly, and presently stopped dead.

"Carburettor's choked probably," said Audrey helpfully.

Julian did not respond to this theory. He got out in his

leisurely style and had a look at the engine. Then he laughed, in a vexed way.

"Looks serious to me. That jester Clatworthy! The bearings have gone to blazes, I'm afraid. He must have run it without oil or some fool's trick like that."

Audrey came and peered at the engine.

"'Fraid I can't advise!"

There was a garage near by, in a big shed. Julian strode over to it, and beckoned a fellow in overalls busy with a disintegrated Ford.

"You might take a look at this sewing machine," said Julian, in his most casual voice. "It's developed a little heart trouble."

The man took a look—a long look—at it, and then grunted.

"Well, you won't get much further with it to-day! Why, the bearings are all gone! Some one's been treating it rough, I should say. Running it hard without a drop of oil. Fair cruelty!"

"Yes," said Julian. "That's what I thought." He cursed Clatworthy again.

"You'll have to leave it with me," said the man.

"How long?"

The man thrust his hair back with an oily hand.

"Can't say, I'm sure. About a fortnight. Maybe longer. It's a job."

"A fortnight!" cried Audrey.

"That's that," remarked Julian, and he lit a cigarette.

"What's to be done?" asked Audrey. "Is there any chance of a train from this place? I hate the idea of tramping back to Oxford and getting one there. Such an anti-climax!"

"Yes," said Julian. "I'm always against turning back."

It was a quarter to three, and an afternoon in May. The sky was as blue as the sea at Capri, except where white clouds floated lazily like sleeping swans. The sun was bright, but not too hot on the road to Nuneham Courtenay. It bronzed the thatched roofs of the cottages, and played among the fruit trees in the gardens, laden with white blossoms. A pleasant breeze stirred the wallflowers and phlox in front of the cottage by which Julian stood smoking.

There was a nice smell about. Some one had been cutting grass near by. A peacock on the stone gate post outside a private park spread its tail in the sun with lazy vanity. Bees were humming, birds singing.

"I hate trains on a day like this," said Julian. "Those third class carriages with hot country girls, the usual sailor, the baby with chocolate, the parson in the corner with the *Morning Post*. Oh, Lord! . . . Why not walk to London?"

Audrey received the idea as an inspiration.

"Noble thought, Julian! Why not, indeed?"

"Easy walking," said Julian. "No record-making. A pleasant amble. Henley to-night, if we feel like it, Maidenhead to-morrow, stop when we're tired."

"Perfectly glorious!" cried Audrey, "and the most romantic way of leaving Oxford after being sent down."

"Romantic? Oh, don't let's worry about that. Shoes any good?"

Audrey studied her brown shoes and looked at one sole backwards.

"Stout as clogs. My old golf shoes."

"Well, what about kit? No fun if we have to carry much. A razor for me, and a pair of pyjamas."

"Pyjamas and a tooth brush for little me."

They took rather more than that but not much. After rummaging in their bags they made a common dump in Julian's knapsack. He rolled Audrey's pyjamas—blue silk—round his own, which were pink, and put her slippers, tooth brush, and a silver-backed hair brush and comb with his razor and other small essentials, in the middle of the bundle.

The garage man watched their arrangements with amazement.

"You two ain't going to walk to London? It's sixty miles and more! I wouldn't do it for gold."

"We're doing it for fun," said Audrey. "And it's not to London but to Surrey. Adventure! Nature! England in May-time!"

"There's a very good train from Oxford," said the man.

"We dislike trains," said Julian.

He handed the man his card and desired word when the Metallurgique was restored in health.

The oily man laughed good-naturedly.

"You'll be damn tired before you get into Surrey. The roads seem a long sight shorter in a car. If you took my advice—"

"That's all right," said Julian, "and here's something for your trouble in advance."

He gave the man a ten shilling note and then turned to Audrey.

"Ready to push off?"

"Why not?"

They walked down to the village of Nuneham Courtenay, and Audrey stopped at a small shop to buy some acid tablets.

"Good as thirst quenchers," she remarked.

Julian decided that some of the cottages belonged to the period of Charles II.

Audrey had left her motor veil behind in the car, and pressed her little blue hat closer over her brown hair. She walked with an easy swinging stride which Julian had remarked on the golf links. She also held her head high and had a smile about her lips. She wore a tight-fitting "jumper" of pale blue and a short brown skirt. Julian found nothing wrong with her appearance likely to discredit him in the face of the sun. He walked without a hat and with his knapsack slung over one shoulder. An old lady coming out of one of the cottages stopped to stare after them as they passed, walking briskly a yard apart, and her wrinkled old face smiled as though she liked the look of them. Youth and May-time! A good sight for old eyes, after the massacre of English boyhood.

IV

THEY did not talk very much while they walked. Audrey hummed a little syncopated tune now and then, with an acid tablet in her left cheek. Julian, who had an eye for colour, noted without remark the symphony of green and gold and silver along the way. The young beech trees were pale and bright against the tangled branches of oak trees not yet clothed in leaf. The hawthorne hedges were a flaming green, and here and there a chestnut tree was in full foliage, each leaf clean and sparkling after a night's rain. The green of young larches was shrill like the reed notes in an orchestra. Some of the fields were silvered with daisies, and others splashed with the gold of celandines and dandelions. In wayside orchards twisted fruit trees, white-washed up to their branches, were smothered with pink blossom, and the breeze strewed some of their petals over the pathways like confetti outside St. Peter's, Eaton Square, on a marriage morning.

"Give me England in May-time," said Audrey.

"I've seen worse places," said Julian. "Probably we'll get snow before the journey's end, or grey skies and arctic winds."

"Pessimist! 'Gather the rosebuds while ye may!'" laughed Audrey.

She gathered a daisy instead and put its stalk between her teeth with the flower dangling from her lips. Presently she took off her blue hat and swung it from one of its ribbons as she walked. The wind played with a few loose curls of her brown hair but could do nothing with its close coils.

"I don't feel a bit as if I'd disgraced myself," she said, a mile or two farther on.

"I shouldn't worry about that," said Julian. "It depends entirely on your sense of humour."

"Oh, I've heaps of that. But one has to pay for it. Probably we'll have to pay for this walk. The Old People make such a fuss about things."

"That's true," said Julian. "They never understand."

"Queer, isn't it?"

Audrey laughed at the queerness of the Old People.

"They seem to forget their own youth. Utterly refuse to see things from our point of view, and won't be taught even by the most patient explanations."

"The obstinacy of intolerance," said Julian.

Audrey harked back to the belief that there would be an unholy row because she had been sent down.

"As if it were my fault that Beatrice Tuck's ridiculous nose got in the way of my fairy footstep!"

Julian laughed in his quiet way.

"Miss Tuck's obtrusive nose was only one link in a chain of connected facts, beginning with Clatworthy's party."

"Anyhow this is good," said Audrey, blushing a little at the mention of Clatworthy, who was supposed to be her most ardent cavalier.

"It's good," she said again ecstatically, "this white road, this sky, the smell of things."

She recited a verse or two as she swung into a longer stride.

"'Now the joys of the road are chiefly these:
A crimson touch on the hard wood trees

A vagrant's morning wide and blue
In early fall, when the wind walks, too;

A shadowy highway cool and brown
Alluring up and enticing down,

From rippled water to dappled swamp
From purple glory to scarlet pomp;

The outward eye, the quiet will,
And the striding heart from hill to hill'"

"Tell me when you feel like tea," said Julian.

She felt like tea in the village of Dorchester, near Benson,

with its little old Tudor and Stuart houses, and its look of having slept in history since a Charles passed that way to set up his court in Oxford in the time of Revolution.

They went into a quiet inn which smelt of polished mahogany, old plaster, and faded rose leaves. There was a tea-garden behind, and they chose that instead of the parlour with closed windows.

Some people were there already—two obvious Americans belonging to a Studebaker they had seen outside, and a thin old lady with a middle-aged daughter and an over-fed spaniel. They didn't matter. Audrey passed them without a glance and found a table for two at the end of a pergola of rambler roses—not yet in flower. It was close to a bed of white alison and forget-me-nots, and shielded from wind in an arbour of its own filled with the afternoon sun. There was a croquet lawn beyond, as smooth as velvet.

Audrey's shoes were white with dust and her face had been touched by the sun and breeze. She drank four cups of tea and ate three chocolate éclairs, and then with a deep sigh of content lit one of Julian's cigarettes and shifted to a deck chair in which she lay back with her eyes closed and a flickering smile about her lips. Julian noticed that she had rather humorous lips, and a straight little nose with two freckles on the bridge. Rather a good-looking kid, altogether.

"Life's pretty good in spots," said Audrey presently. "This is one of the spots, Julian."

He agreed. There was nothing much wrong with it.

"A pity," said Audrey, "we can't make this walk last for weeks and months and years. Just walking on through little old villages, with restful moments in gardens like this."

Julian thought over the idea with a faintly satirical smile.

"The weather wouldn't hold out. And we should get bored with each other."

"Not me," said Audrey generously.

"After the first year or two our clothes would begin to fall off. Somehow or other we should have to replace them for decency's sake."

"Why?" asked Audrey blandly.

"Well, if not for that, for warmth's sake. That would mean earning money somehow and interrupting the walk."

"In any decent scheme of society—" said Audrey.

"In fact," added Julian, as the brutal truth-teller, "we couldn't afford the game for more than a week. I've five quid in my pocket at the most, and I understand you haven't a bean?"

"I never have," said Audrey. "It's hellish."

They were silent after that for some time. Audrey shut her eyes and seemed to sleep, but presently she opened them and laughed.

"You're not really romantic, Julian, in spite of writing morbid verse for the *Isis*. You think things out and don't let your imagination catch fire. At that binge last night you were as cold as ice."

"Rather bored," said Julian. "I hate repetitions."

"I think you're groping towards high ideals," said Audrey. "Trying to find an answer to the little old riddle of life. Tell me."

He looked down at her with a guarded expression in his grey eyes.

"If you mean I haven't a notion what to make of things, you're right. Have any of us? Have you?"

"Not much," said Audrey. "One ought to get such a lot out of life. I'm greedy! But it's a muddled business. Too many restrictions. 'You mustn't do this!' 'You mustn't do that!' 'Keep off the grass!' An awful nuisance."

"I know," agreed Julian. "That's why I've cut Oxford. Partly. It's a cramping institution designed to turn out character in certain moulds."

Audrey sniggered.

"It hasn't moulded me! You men conform more easily, I find."

"Perhaps," said Julian. "Our ideas are shaped on the conventional lines of English life a hundred years ago. Prehistoric now."

Audrey gaped a little.

"How do you mean, Julian, dear?"

"Caste ideas," said Julian, "when the caste has broken

down, more or less. Learning for leisured gentlemen with comfortable estates and ready-made professions, when the late unmentionable war and other things have destroyed their privileges. It seems to me we're pretending things are the same when they're all different. Other things have come along or are coming."

"What things, dear child?"

"The mass mind. Labour. All sorts of damn things which spoil our kind of life."

Julian smiled through his cigarette smoke.

"Of course I'm talking rot. Anyhow Oxford's a backwater, out of the tide of life."

"Gloomy Dean!" said Audrey. "I'm not worrying about the state of the world. It's very messy! It's the personal side of things that afflicts my sensitive young soul at the moment. Parental prohibitions. Large desires and small means. Poverty. Above all, poverty!"

"It's not nice, I suppose," said Julian.

"It's horrid. I happen to know! My father wallows in it. A country parson with four kids! He's had to give up 'baccy and the more expensive kind of books to provide me with a college education. Imagine his sense of tragedy when I tell him I've been sent down. Another hope blasted! Another little maid gone to the devil instead of going to a High School as assistant mistress!"

"What about getting on?" asked Julian.

"Forty winks first."

She curled herself up in the deck chair and slept with her face in the sun. Julian smoked another cigarette and thought out the end of a verse he was writing.

Audrey was just waking up with a yawn when the old lady and the middle-aged daughter and the over-fed spaniel, who had been taking tea at the other end of the pergola, appeared down the garden path.

The middle-aged lady, dressed in a short tweed skirt with jacket to match, stopped in front of Audrey. Julian noticed that she had short hair cut like a boy's and rather watery eyes which did not look straight at the object of vision but wandered uneasily.

"Surely," she said, with an air of delight, "this is Miss Nye of Hartland?"

Audrey sat up without dignity and with a somewhat hostile expression.

"How do you do, Miss Raven. Been having tea?"

"Yes. Such a delightful tea! . . . Mother, this is Audrey Nye, our dear Vicar's daughter."

The old lady beamed.

"What a pleasant coincidence! We are motoring down to see my grand-niece, Nancy Burbridge. And you are taking a little jaunt this afternoon, as a respite from your studies, no doubt?"

"Yes," said Audrey. "Just a little respite!"

She threw a laughing glance at Julian which was intercepted by Miss Raven.

"Your brother, I suppose?" she asked. "Mr. Frank, is it not?"

"Not a bit like Frank," said Audrey. "Mr. Julian Perryam. . . . Mrs. Raven, Julian. Miss Raven. From Hartland."

Julian acknowledged the introduction.

"Nice day," he said politely.

"Can we give you a lift back to Oxford?" asked Miss Raven. "Unless of course you have your own car? But of course you have! How silly of me!"

She gave a shrill, nervous laugh, and her vision wandered between Julian and Audrey.

"I had a car once," said Julian. "But it's broken down. We've decided to walk."

"Oh, no! You must let us give you a lift. Such a pleasure! And such a long walk!"

"As a matter of fact," said Julian curtly, "we're walking in the other direction. Excellent walking weather, don't you think?"

Miss Raven agreed that it was wonderful walking weather. But she did not quite understand—it was foolish of her!—how they could be walking away from Oxford. Would it not be rather difficult to get back? Such a long way already!

"That's all right," said Julian. "We're walking back to Surrey. Taking it leisurely, you know."

Miss Raven did not hide her surprise in which there was a note of dismay.

"Oh, surely not! My dear Miss Nye—"

"And as it's quite a way," said Audrey hastily, "we'd better be starting off again. Good afternoon, Mrs. Raven. Good afternoon, Miss Raven. Come along, Julian!"

She gave them an affable, smiling nod, and swinging her blue hat marched up the pergola followed by Julian, after his bow to the two ladies.

"A bit too abrupt, weren't you?" he asked, after he had paid his bill and joined Audrey in the porch.

Audrey was amused but slightly flushed.

"And you were a bit too candid," she answered. "That woman, Alice Raven, has raised more scandals in Surrey than you can find on a Sunday morning in the *News of the World*. She's a ferret."

"Looks like it rather," said Julian. "I don't like the way she wears her hair."

"Let's forget her," said Audrey. "What a topping evening for a walk! See those long shadows across the road, and the crimson feathers in the sky? I'm good for twelve miles before the stars come out."

V

THEY walked at a good swinging pace while the shadows grew longer and the rich gold of the sunlight paled a little, until the low hills lost their sharpness of outline and were like purple clouds lying above the tawny earth of ploughed fields and the emerald green of pasture land. Presently the woods darkened below and their feathery tops caught the fire of the setting sun, and the sky above them was of turquoise blue with rose-flushed clouds. In the west was a great grey wing with flame-tipped plumage. Dark shadows crept into old barns. There was a jabber of gossip before bed-time in the rookery of a rectory garden. Farm carts crawled down the rutty lanes with tired horses, and country lads called good evening to Julian and Audrey. Birds twittered in the darkening hedges, and flowers in cottage gardens lost their colour but gave out a new richness of scent as the evening dew moistened them. Later a crescent moon rose like a silver scimitar in a sky still blue but no longer rose-flushed, and a star twinkled in the east. The earth was good to smell, and somewhere in the fields behind a farmstead a wood fire was burning, and its bluish smoke was wafted to the nostrils of the girl, who called to Julian to sniff the sharp, thin smell of it.

"Burning wood! It's the odour of romance, the aroma of life's first adventures. Why does it always remind me of that heroic vagabond, Richard Cœur de Lion?"

"Association of ideas," said Julian. "I expect he roasted a deer by a wood fire, or you think he did."

Darkness came, but luminous. The road was white beneath their feet and a little mist crept about them, an exhalation from the warm earth.

Suddenly, beyond Nettlebed, Audrey took hold of Julian's hand and said, "Stop! . . . Listen!"

It was at a gate leading to a farmstead with big old barns.

By the side of the gate was a tall hedge of hawthorn in which a bird was singing.

It was a nightingale warbling to its mate with a few deep, rich, chuckling notes before pouring out its love in passionate song. Audrey's footsteps and her words alarmed it and it stayed quite quiet for a minute while the boy and girl stood there listening. Then it made a few little gurglings of liquid sound and suddenly gave out a high trill and began a *Caprice,* very blithe and quick in change of note and tone, as though striving for the perfect expression of its ecstasy of love.

"Pretty good," said Julian. "Some bird!"

Under such carefully unsentimental words he masked his own wonder at this little voice of beauty which gave him a thrill as though something stirred hidden things in his own nature. He could feel Audrey's hand quiver as she held his wrist. She lifted her face up to the bush and spoke to the now silent bird.

"Hark! ah, the Nightingale!
The tawny-throated!
Hark from that moonlit cedar what a burst!
What triumph! hark—what pain! . . ."

"You're as bad as Stokes Prichard," said Julian. "Better be walking on. It's still a fair step to Henley."

"Bother Henley!" cried Audrey. "Why not sleep out in the fields and forget the haunts of men and all unpleasantness?"

Julian considered the idea for a moment. Certainly it would be rather amusing, but there was a limit even to the simple life and the open road. It would certainly get extremely cold, and anyhow he was hungry. A good inn, with steak and onions, would be more attractive than the sheltered side of a haystack. So he protested to Audrey. Besides—he did not enlarge on that "besides," even in his own mind, but subconsciously there was a touch of caution in his character, some old instinct of self-defence and obedience to the law of convention which as a rule he derided like most of his friends. Audrey was an amusing kid and per-

fectly straight and all that, and there was nothing whatever between them, but all the same one couldn't take too many liberties with the usual scheme of things. In any case, Clatworthy wouldn't like it.

"Me for Henley," he said. "And the biggest meal they can give us at the White Hart."

"Materialist," said Audrey. "Unadventurous and unromantic soul! How nice to see the dawn break and wash one's face in the running brook, and comb one's hair in the morning sun."

"I know that English dawn," said Julian. "Freezes the very marrow in one's bones."

"Doubtless you're right," said Audrey graciously. "You're a wise young man with an old head on young shoulders. But I shall miss a good adventure. I'm in a primitive mood tonight. I'm a child of nature. I want to lie on the earth and embrace the sky. I want to run through dark woods and go to sleep among the fairies. I want to play hide-and-seek with moonbeams. . . . But on the other hand, I admit the lure of steak and onions. How many miles to Henley, did you say?"

It was eight miles still, and Audrey, though a golf-playing girl and half back at hockey, was the worse for wear when she and Julian walked at last into the White Hart Hotel. She limped a little and announced that she had "strained her fetlock."

The young woman in the office was doubtful whether she had two rooms. "Any luggage?" she asked, with what Julian considered to be unnecessary suspicion of his transparent honesty.

"A tooth brush between us," he said in his somewhat arrogant way. "We don't mind paying in advance, if that would please you."

The young woman softened, because of his look of mastery, or perhaps because of his grey eyes and the curve of his upper lip. Other young women had served him gladly because of his youthful arrogance.

"That's all right," she said. "Brother and sister, I suppose?"

"No," said Julian. "Uncle and niece."

He signed the book, and passed it to Audrey who scrawled her name across the page in her big, bold hand.

"Now for a wash," said Audrey, "and a tremenjous meal!"

They could not get steak and onions, which was a real blow. It was too late for hot food and they sat down to cold ham and pickles.

"What about a teeny weeny cocktail?" asked Audrey. "It would put the right touch to the end of a perfect day."

"It's a bad habit for young ladies," said Julian, but he yielded.

Over the meal they talked of Oxford friends like two old people who had left that life far behind. They were already beginning to feel the charm of its tradition.

"Of course, I'm glad to have been up at Balliol," said Julian. "It's a good thing to have behind one."

"What's your programme now?" asked Audrey. "How are you going to jab at life?"

"Oh, I shan't be in too much of a hurry," said Julian, "My Governor can afford to give me a bit of rope. Literature is my ambition."

"It would be!" said Audrey. "The *Isis* has been responsible for many lost fortunes and desperate failures."

"Something after the style of John Masefield," continued Julian. "Real stuff. Perhaps I'll have a shot at a play. Blank verse, of course."

"Who's your father to pay for such a hobby?" asked Audrey. "Horribly rich, of course, by the way you fling your money around. And that car of yours!"

Julian looked embarrassed.

"Not over rich. He used to be poor."

"A war profiteer? What luck!"

Julian tried to avoid her cross-questioning. His face had flushed uneasily.

"Didn't Clatworthy tell you?"

"Not a word. Is it a dark secret? Not the public hangman or anything like that?"

"More disgraceful," said Julian. "He's the editor of *The*

Week, 'All the Truth.' The largest circulation of any Sunday paper. Frightful, isn't it?"

Audrey found it amusing, but not frightful.

"How perfectly thrilling! What a lot you must know about Society Scandals and the tit-bits of the Divorce Court. Are you going to became a journalist and defend the dear old British Empire from all slander and assault?"

"Not that degradation," said Julian.

"Oh, I don't know. I wouldn't mind being a lady reporter if the life is anything like a novel I read—'The Street of Adventure.' "

"It isn't," said Julian. "And the proprietor of *The Week* is one of the worst scoundrels in England. It's a disgrace to be associated with him."

"Victor Buckland?"

Audrey quoted a familiar line.

"—'Another powerful article by Victor Buckland (inset) will appear in the next issue of *The Week,* entitled "Why God Loves the Englishman." '—Well, you must admit he's patriotic, Julian. Where would the British Empire be without dear old Buckland?"

"Infernal old hypocrite!" growled Julian. "A Junker with his tongue in his cheek. The most poisonous influence in English life. Have another pickle?"

Audrey preferred a black coffee.

It was while he was ordering it and Audrey was smoking a cigarette over a copy of *The Sketch* before a wood fire in the lounge that Julian was startled by a friendly voice.

"Hullo, young Perryam!"

Julian swung round on his heel and saw an elderly man in a golf suit. He had a broad, good-humoured face, very bronzed, with a little grey moustache on the upper lip. It was Major Iffield, a friend and neighbour of his father's at Gorse Hill.

Julian greeted him without enthusiasm.

"Good evening, sir. You here?"

"Very much here."

Major Iffield explained that he had been spending a week-

end with the Hetheringtons at Boar's Hill, and had broken down hopelessly in his car on the way back a mile outside Henley.

"The worst of a cheap car! Come and have a whiskey or something."

"Afraid I can't," said Julian coldly. "I'm with a friend."

"Oh, well, bring him along," said Major Iffield.

"It's a lady," said Julian.

He glanced toward Audrey, who turned round and smiled.

For a moment Major Iffield looked slightly startled. But he was obviously a gentleman, though a little clumsy in his manner.

"Perhaps you'll allow me to join you? It's extremely boring alone."

"By all means," answered Julian. "Audrey, this is Major Iffield. . . . Miss Audrey Nye."

The Major bowed and shook hands with Audrey in a hearty way.

"Daughter of Mr. Nye of Hartland?" he asked.

"Alas, yes!" said Audrey. "A clergyman's daughter, and wedded to holy poverty."

Major Iffield laughed rather noisily.

"I have a great admiration for your father, any way. Would either of you young people like any refreshment? A liqueur—lemonade . . . ?"

"Nothing at all, thanks," said Audrey graciously. "A little bed for me very soon."

"Oh, it's early yet," said the Major.

He asked a few questions about Oxford. He had been at the House—a million years ago. But Oxford didn't change. The spirit of youth survived. Nothing could change that. Not even the Great War!

A shadow crossed his heavy, good-humoured face, and he sighed a little.

"You were too young for that, Perryam?"

"Yes. By a year."

"Lucky for you. Above all, lucky for your father."

"Oh, I don't know," said Julian carelessly. "I missed something, I expect."

Major Iffield seemed to find those words amusing.

"You certainly did! Very unpleasant things, if they happened to hit you. But I forgot! It's bad form to talk about the War, I'm told. Do you play golf at all?"

He told a few golf stories which Julian found very dull, though they seemed to amuse Audrey. But she was the first to bring the evening to an end.

"Well . . . I confess to somnolence. Good night, Major Iffield. Thanks for your anecdotes. They will make my father laugh."

"Excellent," said Major Iffield.

"Coming, Julian?" asked Audrey.

Julian yawned rather theatrically.

"Yes, I'm dog tired. Good night, sir."

"Good night, Perryam. I hope to see your father soon. Delighted to have run against you."

Julian and Audrey went up the brown oak staircase to their bedrooms. They did not see Major Iffield walk quietly into the hall and look in the register book, and then stare after them with a kind of trouble in his kindly eyes until they disappeared on the first floor.

Audrey was holding Julian's hand. She was really tired.

"A bore meeting people sometimes," she said.

"Especially that Major man. A hero of the late unmentionable, but rather wearisome. Those golf stories!"

"Thirty-one, thirty-two," said Audrey, peering at the old oak doors. "Which do you want?"

Julian opened both doors, and turned on the lights. Each room was furnished in an exactly similar way, a little white bed, a Georgian chest of drawers, a wash-hand stand with marble top, a dressing-table and looking-glass, two brass candlesticks without candles on the mantelpiece, an old oak beam across the ceiling.

"Thirty-one for me," said Audrey. "To avoid argument."

She smiled at him as he undid the knapsack and rummaged for her blue silk pyjamas, silver-backed hair brush, tooth brush and things.

"It's been a great day, Julian!"

"Topping. How's the fetlock?"

"That's nothing. There'll be worse things to bear at the journey's end. Family indignation. Sordid domesticity. . . . Thanks for this adventure, my dear."

She held out her hand to him, and when he took it put her face up for him to kiss.

"Think so?" asked Julian, doubtfully, and with a hint of embarrassment. "What about Clatworthy?"

She flushed quickly and laughed.

"What's that to do with it? I don't belong to him."

"All right then!"

He kissed her on the cheek, without any ardour. Then she took up her things, and with a "Sleep well!" went to her own room with a little smile about her lips.

Julian undressed in a leisurely way, read a pocket edition of Rupert Brooke in bed, and then turned off his switch with a sleepy yawn as the heavy footsteps of Major Iffield strode along the passage.

VI

THEY did not walk further than Henley, and in a prosaic way took the train to Town after luncheon at the White Hart on the following day. From Paddington they taxied to Victoria and took different trains home, as their stations were on separate lines in Surrey.

The reason for this departure from the open road was Audrey's ankle. She confessed at a late breakfast (ten o'clock) that it was badly swollen and unfit for further walking of a heroic kind.

"I'm a broken reed," she declared with shame. "And to think that I played hockey for Somerville! I'm a disgrace to my sex."

This humiliation did not prevent her from making an excellent breakfast nor from recovering her love of life and beauty when she lay back in a punt which Julian piloted with easy grace down Henley Reach. They lay up for a time under the lawn of Phyllis Court where geraniums were in bloom and Audrey dabbled her hands in the sparkling water, and delivered sundry remarks upon the jolliness of nature with occasional quotations from the poems of Rupert Brooke, Bliss Carmen, John Masefield, and E. V. Lucas. After that it began to rain so that the punt cushions were wet and the trees dripped upon them as they smoked cigarettes in a little backwater to which they glided for shelter, and a cold breeze caused Audrey to sneeze several times in succession.

"So much for England in May-time!" said Julian with sarcasm.

"Yes. You poet laddies ignore the brutal realities. I expect I'll catch my death of cold," remarked Audrey, as though it was all Julian's fault.

"And that's the girl who wanted to sleep out last night and play hide-and-seek with the moonbeams!"

A well-flung cushion at his head was the answer to that reminder of romantic aspirations. He dodged it and it fell into the river and Audrey squealed with joy as he fished it out with the punt-hook, all soppy. After that they had gone back to the White Hart, eaten a prodigious lunch (in spite of the ten o'clock breakfast) and caught the 2.15 to Town. They saw no more of Major Iffield and learnt from the waiter that he had motored off at half-past nine in his two-seater Standard, which had been repaired.

At Victoria Julian bought several illustrated weeklies which he put on Audrey's lap as she sat in the corner of a third-class smoking carriage, opposite an old gentleman who regarded her with disapproval when she lit a cigarette from her own tortoise shell case.

"Keep in touch with me, Julian," was her parting remark. "I shall languish in disgrace and gloom henceforth. No more binges. No more cocktails! No more adventure!"

"Heaps more adventure," said Julian. "Anyhow I'll come over and carry you off when that little old car is running again."

"Promise? Honest Injun?"

She exacted the promise anxiously, as though it were of high importance.

"Parole d'honneur!" said Julian.

She held his hand a minute before the train moved off, and afterwards put her head out of the window and waved to him.

"Nice kid!" said Julian, as he sloped to the station bookstall, and bought *The Light Car, Punch* and a new novel of Compton Mackenzie's. He smiled to himself at the remembrance of that walk to Henley. It had been quite amusing. A good episode. Standing without a hat waiting for the train to Guildford, he remembered that Audrey had left her pyjamas and things in the knapsack still slung over his shoulder and he laughed to himself at this forgetfulness. A few elderly people glanced at him with approving eyes, because of that laugh and his look of health and youth. Perhaps they remembered for a moment the Youth that had gone to a war and not come back. They did not guess that

he had been sent down from Oxford, or had sent himself down, and that he hadn't a notion what to do with life. He looked as though he commanded life, with smiling confidence.

Julian's arrival home at the big house at Gorse Hill a week after he had left for a new term at Oxford surprised the servants who were laying tea on the terrace leading to the tennis lawn. One of them, old Mary, who had been Julian's nursemaid in days which he only dimly remembered—his people were just advancing to prosperity and lived at Wimbledon after their early struggles in Brixton—announced her astonishment and delight.

"Lor', Mr. Julian! Another 'oliday? Well, that's a blessing for you, I'm sure."

He enquired casually about the family movements before going to his room to wash and change. Mary was full of information, as usual, as to the psychological state of the people whom she served with fidelity, affection, and occasional outbursts of bad temper.

"Your Grandpa's taking a nap in the study. Breaking up, in my numble opinion. He's getting that irritable there's no doing nothing with him. Thinks them damn Germans is up to trouble again."

"Where are the others?"

His sister Janet was playing golf with Cyril Buckland and was expected back to tea. But just as like as not, in Mary's opinion, they might not show up till to-morrow's breakfast. Fair daft on them jazz dances, both of them. Of course it wasn't for her to interfere with the goings on of young people nor the ruin to their health. The mistress was paying an afternoon call at the Iffields. Wearing herself out with that society stuff. There had never been no peace since the good old Brixton days. The master was coming home by the train at 4.55 and the car was meeting him at the station. Worried, thought Mary, and wouldn't make old bones. Never the same since Mister John was killed, and no wonder what with Lloyd George and the Germans and everything. . . .

Julian was in his bath when his sister Janet arrived in

the garden with Cyril Buckland. He could hear their voices talking nineteen to the dozen and Janet's ripples of laughter. Poisonous fellow, Buckland, he thought. The son of Victor Buckland, the proprietor of his father's paper, and the heir to the preposterous fortune the old man had made out of Jingoism, divorce and social scandal. Young Cyril had been wounded on the Somme, but not badly, before he took a cushy job at Rouen or somewhere. He told rather blue stories after dinner, but was all elegance and epigram with ladies present. There were stories about a chorus girl—oh, well, that was his affair.

Julian decided to get into flannels. He might put in a set at tennis after tea. Buckland certainly played a good game, though rather too showy for actual results.

Julian pitched his knapsack in a corner of the room and wondered when his bags would arrive from Oxford. He would have to plant some of his photographs round the room. It had been Jack's room before he was killed outside Arras in '17. Five years ago, when Julian was sixteen. He remembered the news coming home from the War Office and his mother's grief. It had nearly killed her, and the governor had been hard hit too, though afterwards he seemed to find some comfort in the thought of Jack's heroism and his own "sacrifice." Julian was at school then, at Winchester. The news of Jack's death had shocked him in a queer way. He had cried a little, he remembered, that night in bed, and then thought with a curious sense of inevitability, "My turn next. In two years I shall be old enough to join up. Then I shall be killed, like all the others." After that there had been no lingering grief in his mind. Poor old Jack had been at Sandhurst and they hadn't seen much of each other since childhood. His death put Julian level with some of the other kids who had lost brothers in the war and bucked about it. What an enormous time ago! All that was forgotten now, thank goodness!

As he chose his tie from a drawer containing a rich variety, Julian heard his father's arrival by the well-known engine beat of an Armstrong Siddely. Presently his father's voice sounded in the garden with a cheerful greeting to

Janet and the rasper Buckland. His father always adopted a breezy cheerfulness with his family and friends, though Julian sometimes suspected that it was a kind of mask hiding anxieties, disappointments, and some inner fretfulness with fate, for causes unknown.

"Hullo, Jenny, my dear!"

"Hullo, Dad!"

"Mother back yet?"

"Sure to be here before long."

There was a full assembly of the family on the terrace when Julian made his appearance, clean, cool, comfortable, in new flannels. His mother was at the tea table with its silver urn, assisted by a pretty servant maid, and Julian noticed that the mater, as he called her, looked ridiculously young, as usual. His father, still in city clothes, had undone the bottom button of his black waistcoat with a white slip, and was sitting back in a deck chair enjoying a cigar. Janet in a fawn coloured golf frock sat with a cup of tea in her lap, looking pleased with herself. Her coil of flaxen hair caught the sun, and gleamed like pale gold. Julian's grandfather, a tall old man in a grey frock-coat and trousers newly pressed, sat up stiffly in a cane chair with his thin white hands clasping the ivory handle of an ebony stick.

Julian's arrival on the terrace certainly created a sensation among some members of the family.

His father took the cigar out of his mouth and raised himself in the deck chair.

"You here, Julian? Anything the matter?"

Janet opened her blue eyes very wide, expressing astonishment.

"Nothing the matter," said Julian calmly, though his fine skin flushed ever so slightly. "I've left Oxford. That's all."

"Left Oxford!"

The words were spoken almost together by Mr. Perryam and Janet.

Mrs. Perryam had shown no sign of surprise at her son's sudden return, though she had a heightened colour, and a queer little smile in those violet coloured eyes which he had

once thought were the most beautiful in the world. She had the look of a great lady and it was impossible to believe that she had once kept a little house in Brixton without a servant.

"I was at the Iffields' this afternoon," she said with a comical sideways glance at Julian. "Major Iffield told me he had seen you at Henley yesterday—with a friend."

Julian nodded.

"I thought he'd pass the word along."

"Rather rummy idea, wasn't it?" asked his mother. "Walking back like that, I mean?"

"Nothing wrong with it," said Julian.

"Well, I hope not, my dear. You boys and girls do amazing things these days."

Mr. Perryam did not seem to follow the drift of this conversation.

"What do you mean by saying you've left Oxford, old boy?" he asked anxiously. "You mean for a day in Town or something?"

"No," said Julian, with a bored look. "Down for good. They would probably have sent me down anyhow—for one or two dances I put in after hours—but I took the matter into my own hands. . . . Cup of tea, mother?"

"Well, I'm blowed," said Janet. "You are a freak, Julian!"

"Hard luck, old man!" said Cyril Buckland, grinning at Julian and brushing up the little moustache on his upper lip. "Not that there's much in it. I was sent down from Cambridge before the war and it didn't blast my reputation, as far as I know."

"Do they provide you with reputations at that village in the Midlands?" asked Julian with the insolence of Oxford to the rival University.

Cyril Buckland, who was five years older than Julian, looked slightly annoyed at this gibe, but passed it off with an air of good humour.

"Not original, laddie. Try another."

Julian's grandfather, who had been listening with a look

of strained attention, dug his stick into the gravel of the terrace and spoke in a querulous voice.

"I can't think why you young men and women don't take things more seriously. It's all tennis and golf and the picture palaces, and flying about in motor cars. Why can't you stay in the same place a bit? Gadding about, rushing about, never satisfied! When I was a young clerk in the Board of Trade, and courting your grandmother, Julian, I used to hurry back from work to mow the little lawn at Herne Hill, and then study French or something after supper. I used to read Emerson, Carlyle, Darwin, John Stuart Mill, to improve my mind and serve my country. Now that the war's over you young men don't seem able to settle down or think of the future. Of course I know you think I'm an old fool—"

His voice trailed off into a melancholy wail.

"No, we don't, Grandpa," said Janet. "You've a lot of wisdom in your old noddle, only it's a bit out of date. Drink up your tea, there's a dear."

Mr. Perryam was looking at his son with the same air of anxious enquiry. He was a fair-haired, florid-complexioned man, with a touch of grey on each side of his temples.

"I can't quite understand," he said in a vexed way. "Do you mean to say you have deliberately abandoned your University career, or wrecked it by some kind of rag?"

"It amounts to that, if you call it a career," said Julian, helping himself to some gooseberry jam.

Mr. Perryam threw his cigar into one of the flower-beds.

"I do call it a career," he said, breathing rather hard. "I wanted you to take a good degree and do well at the Union and all that. I counted on a brilliant future for you."

"Oh, Lord!" said Julian.

Mr. Perryam did not like that "Oh, Lord!" and his face flushed rather angrily.

"Why not? I've given you chances which I couldn't afford as a young man. I had to pick up my education as I went along. I had to read hard after reporting jobs. I'd have given my right hand to go to Oxford."

"It isn't worth it," said Julian. "It's a much over-rated institution. A kindergarten."

"But my dear fellow—"

"Now then, you two!" said Mrs. Perryam, in her cheery way, "Don't let's have a dog-fight over the tea-table. It's rather rough on our guest here."

"Don't mind me," said Cyril Buckland. "I want to be regarded as one of the family."

He glanced at Janet with an air of gallantry, and she made a little grimace at him, but blushed very charmingly.

"Well," said Mr. Perryam, with a rather weak laugh, "I don't want to play the domestic tyrant. Not in my line! You know I only want your happiness, Julian, old boy. We had better have a talk about this later."

"Must we?" asked Julian, without enthusiasm.

His father did not answer, but left the tea-table whistling with sham cheerfulness. But he had a worried look, and Julian noticed that he was getting a little flabby, with a heavy way of breathing. It was his work on that infernal paper which debauched the mind of the English public.

Julian's grandfather made another speech without apparent reference to the immediate situation.

"Of course we're playing the fool with the Germans. In my opinion there'll be another war in twenty years. This poison gas they've invented would choke London before you could get an antidote. Why, even this garden would be blasted so that not a leaf could grow! And nobody seems to mind! Young men are idling about without definite aim. The whole world is flouting the will of God. I was only reading in the papers yesterday—"

Mrs. Perryam laughed and patted him on his bony old knee.

"Never you mind what you read in the papers, Grandpa. It's all a pack of lies. Except in *The Week,* of course!"

"Ay, lies," said the old man. "That's the trouble. Everybody's lying. As if I couldn't see through it all!"

"I'll take on the Perryam family at tennis," announced Cyril Buckland.

Julian and Janet accepted his challenge.

VII

CYRIL BUCKLAND stayed to dinner without being invited, to the evident displeasure of Mr. Perryam, who was cold in his manner to the son of his proprietor.

"He seems to be making a home of the place," said Julian to his mother in a tone of extreme annoyance, as he went up to his room to change again and put on a dinner jacket. His vexation was not entirely due to the complete defeat he had suffered on the tennis court from Cyril's punishing serves and rapid work at the net with a rather supercilious smile every time he secured a point and his final triumphant enquiry of "What about that village in the Midlands?"

Mrs. Perryam answered her son's protest with a cheery laugh.

"He's all right!"

She hesitated a moment and then spoke with an amusing little wink.

"I think he's rather taken with Janet."

"Obviously," said Julian. "But if I have anything to say about it, Janet's not going to get fond of him. I couldn't stick such a blighter for a brother-in-law."

Mrs. Perryam showed a complete disregard for his ruffled feelings.

"That's for Janet to decide, and it hasn't got as far as that yet, or anything like it. Your father is dreadfully prejudiced against the poor boy simply because he happens to be Victor Buckland's son."

"Very wise of the governor," said Julian.

"Not at all," answered his mother calmly. "With Cyril as his son-in-law it would consolidate his position on *The Week*. It would make *me* feel much more secure. I've suffered enough from the uncertainty of journalism. Up to-day and down to-morrow."

Julian stared at his mother with angry surprise.

"Good Lord, what a horrible idea! I didn't know you were so mercenary, mother. Putting Janet up for sale!"

Mrs. Perryam thrust her fingers through his hair.

"Now then, my lad! None of your Oxford superiority! I'm not taking any. See?"

Julian mumbled something like an apology.

"Sorry, mother. But it's a disgusting idea, it seems to me."

He went up to his room gloomily, and decided to tell Janet what he knew of Cyril's private character. The fellow was perfectly poisonous, non-moral to the last degree. Dash it all, Janet had a right to know before making a little ass of herself.

At dinner he was distinctly cold to Cyril's conversational efforts and disliked the way in which Janet played up to them and laughed at little idiotic remarks which Cyril Buckland seemed to mistake for brilliant wit. He noticed that Janet looked more grown-up than when she had last come back from her convent school in Switzerland. She was wearing an evening frock, cut rather low at the neck, and with bare arms, and her hair was done in a new style which made her look a little like Gladys Cooper. He realised with a shock of surprise that she was extremely pretty, with those coils of fair hair, and blue eyes with long lashes, and a laughing kind of mouth. She was no longer the child he had treated with lofty disdain and brotherly condescension. She was the sort of girl that would send Stokes Prichard off the deep end and make him quote poetry by the yard. And she was getting impudent, too, and considerably bumptious. When Julian opposed some statement of Cyril's about the right way to hold a tennis racket, she turned to him with a flash of temper and said, "After your dismal display this afternoon you needn't pose as a tennis champion, old boy! Allow some one else to express an opinion."

"It isn't a question of opinion," answered Julian. "It's a matter of scientific fact."

"Good old Oxford!" said Janet scornfully. "Always so knowing!"

Mr. Perryam sat at the head of the table rather silently, with an absent-minded look. Now and then he made an effort to be bright, and passed unnecessary things to Cyril Buckland or Janet, and made some obvious remarks with rather forced cheerfulness about the weather. Nobody paid much attention to him, as usual, and he relapsed into silence again. Once he looked over at Julian and said, "What's the general opinion in Oxford, old boy, about the international situation?"

Julian smiled with a little secret amusement. It was rather like one of Grandfather's interruptions.

"They're not worrying about it, sir."

"Then they ought to," said Perryam. "It's having a disastrous effect on trade." He raised his head, as though to give expression to some pent-up ideas, but seeing that nobody was prepared to listen—Cyril Buckland was making a rabbit out of his table-napkin and pretending to bite Janet's bare arm with it—he only sighed.

Grandfather chewed his meat with grim pertinacity and once nearly choked over a bit of gristle, so that Janet had to thump him on the back.

After dinner Cyril and Janet went into the billiard room for a game of "pills," as Cyril called it—he would, thought Julian—and Mrs. Perryam went to write some letters.

"Come into my study, Julian," said his father.

It was Julian's turn to sigh. Indeed he gave a little groan. The Governor wanted explanations, of course. And he wouldn't understand, and he would be irritable and angry and plaintive and affectionate, and make Julian feel constrained and untruthful and ungrateful, and all that.

That was exactly what happened.

Mr. Perryam offered Julian a fat cigar and protested that he was over-smoking himself and hoped Julian was putting a limit on tobacco. It was certainly not good for the heart. He made a few remarks about the neighbourhood. Everything was going down owing to high taxation. The Bellairs had given up their old house and park. The family had been there for five hundred years. Many other old places were up for sale—White Cross, General Langley's

place, the Mervyns' estate near Westcott, old Oliver's, Lord Culross's. The Government was crippling Capital. That super-tax was iniquitous. The Middle Classes, to say nothing of the old aristocracy, were being ground to dust. Business was in a bad way.

It was quite a time before the inevitable question happened. Julian smiled faintly when it came. He had been expecting it a long while ago.

"What about this idea of leaving Oxford, old boy? Surely you're not serious?"

"Perfectly serious. I'm fed up with it. I've got all I want out of it."

"But my dear lad, it's a disgrace to leave it like that."

"Disgrace?" said Julian blandly. "Oh, Lord, no!"

"Sent down. Without a degree. I'm desperately disappointed."

"What's the use of a degree?" asked Julian. "It doesn't mean anything. Any fool can get it, and lots do. Surely you don't imagine its a guarantee of scholarship or intellectual attainment?"

"To some extent," said Mr. Perryam, "surely?"

"Good Heavens, no! That's a hopelessly old-fashioned notion."

"Then I'm hopelessly old-fashioned," said Mr. Perryam, with an uneasy laugh. "I've always had a respect for a man who could put B.A. after his name. My education has been so slipshod, so hugger-mugger. I've had to pick it up all myself, and even now I know very little of the classics except what I've read in translations, like Gilbert Murray's. I'd give a lot to read Horace in the original—and Æschylus."

Julian laughed at him.

"My dear Governor, do you think the average fellow who takes a degree can read Greek and Latin with any freedom or pleasure? He only comes away from Oxford with the deep conviction that there *are* such languages, after painful swotting over a few cram books with the handy crib."

"Then what *do* you learn?" asked Perryam patiently.

"Do you mean to tell me the whole University system is a fraud?"

"Not quite that," said Julian, with judicial impartiality. "One has a good time, of course—though it bored me stiff after a bit. One makes some very decent friends, one gets a bit of atmosphere, a little smattering of ancient learning, utterly useless, but not unamusing, and one learns how to tie a decent bow, how to handle a punt, how to hold a golf club or a cricket bat, how to tip a waiter with easy nonchalance, and many expensive and agreeable tastes. Oxford stamps one with the hall mark of a social caste recognised by an affected accent, superior manners, and the snob instinct."

"There's more in it than that, old boy," said Perryam. "I'm afraid you've got into the wrong set."

"On the contrary," said Julian, "I was lucky in avoiding the æsthetes with their side whiskers, doped cigarettes and cult of immorality. I also gave a miss, more or less, to the husky crowd who drink four cocktails before dinner and go up the river for deliberate drunks. I consorted with the normal crowd who'll soon be down looking for a job in life without a notion what it's going to be and with an Oxford education as their handicap."

"I'm afraid you've been cultivating cynicism, old boy," said Mr. Perryam.

"The privilege of youth," said Julian with a faint smile.

His father rose from his chair and flung his half-finished cigar into the fire-grate as at tea-time he had thrown another into a flower-bed.

"The privilege of youth," he repeated. "Cynicism! . . . Frankly I don't understand what's happened to young men after the war. Poor dear Jack wasn't like that. What's come over you all, Julian? You seem to have lost zest. You're all hard in your ideas and slack in your habits. Fearfully slack. The fellows in my office have their eye on the clock all the time. I used to work night and day as a young journalist, and think nothing of it."

"It doesn't seem worth while these days," said Julian.

"The standard of value has altered, I suppose. We think more of life and less of money-making."

Mr. Perryam cleared his throat huskily.

"I don't find young men scornful of money, old boy. Not a bit of it. More wages for less work. Look at Labour. My God—look at Labour!"

"What's the matter with it?" asked Julian.

"Don't you study the question at Oxford?" asked Mr. Perryam. "Don't you know that Labour with its socialistic programme is going to complete the ruin of England which the War began? Why, they'll tax people like me till we might as well throw up the sponge. What's the good of individual initiative, enterprise, the struggle for success? Unless you fellows fight it, Julian, you're going to see Socialism reduce England to the level of a Boer Republic."

"It's Labour's day out," said Julian. "They've got most of the brains and all the arguments. A nuisance, I admit, for people like ourselves."

"If we take it lying down," said his father. "If the young men of to-day don't care a damn they'll find themselves in Queer Street before long. And they don't seem to care. That's what bothers me."

"We're not worrying," said Julian. "What's the use?"

His father answered with a touch of irritation.

"No. You're not worrying! It's we older folk who have to do the worrying. Look at my life. A continual struggle, ceaseless worry, desperately hard work. I've known the ups and downs of a journalist's life, the frightful insecurity of tenure, the serfdom of 'the Street.' I've been turned out of good jobs by the whim of an editor, or a change of proprietorship. I've known the terrors of a free-lance, writing articles, stories, advertisements, to pay the weekly bills, and agonising when all one's ideas give out, and worry causes sleepless nights and incapacity for work. Your mother and I have known hard times, old boy, before success came! But I never showed the white feather. I've fought hard for my present position—and I have to fight hard to keep it, I don't mind telling you! That fellow

Buckland— However, you don't worry! You young men are not worrying! That's the trouble."

"What's the trouble?" asked Julian coldly. "Why worry? What's the use?"

Mr. Perryam was silent for a few moments and glanced at his son wearily once or twice.

"Perhaps I worry too much," he said presently. "I'll admit that. The fact is I'm becoming obsessed with the international situation. I don't like the look of it. God knows I played up during the war, and all that. . . . But this Peace! It seems to me nothing but an armed truce. . . . And we're raking up the old hatreds again, creating new enemies. France instead of Germany, or Russia as well as Germany. I can't stand, privately, for French policy in the Ruhr. It's asking for trouble in the near future. Anyhow it doesn't make for European recovery or the spirit of peace. I confess I'm afraid of what's boiling up in Europe again. Not for my own sake. I've had my innings. But for young fellows like you, Julian—the younger brothers of the elder brothers. . . . But you're not worrying!"

He repeated Julian's phrase for the third time as though it had fascinated him.

Julian looked at his father with amusement, and spoke with irony.

"It's a pity your private views conflict with your public policy. I mean the blood and thunder patriotism of the dear old *Week*. 'To Hell with the Huns.' 'Why should France be supreme in the Air?' 'Are we going to lie down to America?'— That sort of thing doesn't make for peace, I imagine?"

Mr. Perryam coloured slightly and laughed uneasily.

"I have to carry out Buckland's policy. They're not my views. I'm not a free agent, old boy."

"A bought man!" said Julian coldly.

His father started in his chair, and for the first time answered angrily.

"I don't like that phrase, Julian! I'd advise you not to use it again."

"Sorry, sir," said Julian, amiably, but not ruffled.

Mr. Perryam recovered his good humour with an effort. "In a way we're all bought men. We all have to compromise with our ideas in order to earn a livelihood or establish a career. The barrister pleads from a brief, much in the same way as I do. Advocates a case without necessarily believing in it. In the Army a man has to carry out orders even if they lead to death and disaster."

"Yes, but not to the degradation of the human intellect or the loss of his own soul," said Julian in his best Union manner.

His careless words seemed to hit his father like a blow in the face, though he was unaware of the hurt he had inflicted, and tapped a cigarette on a silver case before putting a match to it.

Mr. Perryam became pale, and the lines under his eyes darkened. But once again he forced himself to smile at this handsome boy of his upon whom all his ambition had been set.

"I hope I haven't sold my soul to the devil because I take old Buckland's salary," he said with a forced laugh. "Don't forget this, old boy: *The Week,* with all its faults —and I don't say it's nobler than its rivals—maintains this household in something like luxury and supported you rather handsomely at Oxford."

"That's so," Julian admitted graciously. "In that way it serves a useful purpose, perhaps. The individual gains at the expense of the community, as usual."

Mr. Perryam regarded his son's handsome profile with secret admiration. Much as this boy's words hurt at times his youthful arrogance was not deliberately unkind nor—alas!—entirely unjustified.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "I didn't bring you in here for controversial purposes. What do you propose doing now you've left Oxford? Any idea?"

"A few vague ideas," said Julian cautiously.

Mr. Perryam laughed good-humouredly again. "Vague ideas won't carry you far, old boy. Haven't you any ambition? The Law? The Foreign Office? The Indian Civil?"

"No," said Julian decidedly. "The Law's overcrowded, and the Civil Service would bore me to death."

"What about journalism?" asked Mr. Perryam reluctantly. "I could get you a job on *The Week*. It's a good training, and with all its faults Fleet Street still holds out prizes to men of talent. Only you would have to begin at the bottom of the ladder, as I did."

Julian rose from his chair impatiently, with a sudden flush on his face.

"No, I'm damned if I do! Not the stunt press, with its divorce news and fabricated lies and dirty politics and split infinitives and hopeless vulgarities. Not after Winchester and Balliol."

"Why not?" asked Mr. Perryam coldly. "Do you think we haven't Balliol men in Fleet Street? Why, I refuse jobs to them every other day!"

"Anyhow, I'd rather sweep a crossing, father. It's cleaner, from what I've seen."

Mr. Perryam looked rather crushed. His eyes avoided Julian's cold and contemptuous gaze.

"There are other papers besides *The Week*," he answered humbly. "Still, I don't want to force you into journalism, old boy. I'd rather you went into business, or anything else, not because I despise my profession—I don't!—but because I know its difficulties and disadvantages only too well. But what's your alternative?"

Julian thrust his hands into the pockets of his dinner jacket.

"Is there any immediate hurry? I suppose my allowance goes on as usual?"

His father smiled at him, rather ironically.

"Oh, *The Week* will help to pay for it, if you'll condescend to take such filthy money."

Then as though repenting of his sarcasm, he spoke seriously and tenderly.

"What's your scheme, Julian? I'll back anything for your happiness, as long as you set to work. I'd hate to see you lounging—at a loose end—like so many fellows to-day. I couldn't bear that."

"I want to take my time," said Julian. "I've an idea of writing."

"Writing?"

His father was frankly astonished.

"Isn't that the same thing as journalism?"

"No," said Julian. "Utterly different. I mean Literature. Plays, novels, verses."

"Literature, eh?"

His father shook his head and smiled.

"I had that idea once. Then I became a journalist and earned my living."

"Some fellows make pots of money," said Julian. "Barrie, Galsworthy, Shaw, Compton Mackenzie. Not that I'm out for money."

Mr. Perryam laughed with real enjoyment this time.

"It's useful. I find it necessary. Still if you happen to be a genius, old lad, you may be able to support me in my old age."

"I don't pretend to genius," said Julian modestly, "but I have a few ideas, and perhaps a touch of style. Anyhow I can but try."

"Certainly," said Mr. Perryam. "And there's always Fleet Street as a last resource. Or even the workhouse, or the unemployment dole."

He repented again of satire. This boy of his was so young, so self-confident, so unwounded by life's disillusions. How he envied him! He put his hand on Julian's shoulder.

"I'll be proud of any success you make, old lad. Be sure of that. I can at least put the reviewers to work. 'Published to-day. Brilliant first novel.' There'll be no holding your mother down."

"Oh, well, it mayn't come off," said Julian. "I don't buck in advance."

Janet's voice rang out from the garden path through the French windows of Mr. Perryam's study.

"Coming to have a game of Bridge, you two?"

"Coming, Kiddy," answered her father.

VIII

WHEN Julian went up to bed that night with a novel by Galsworthy under his arm his mother stood by his bedroom door and said in a smiling but rather aggressive way, "I want to speak to you, my lad!"

"What's the trouble, mother o' mine?" asked Julian.

He noticed that she looked in what he used to call a "spanking" mood when as a small boy she administered punishment regretfully but firmly. He thought also how jolly she looked in her evening gown of white velvet with a sprig of diamonds in her hair which did not show a thread of grey unless one looked very carefully. He knew the faint colour in her cheeks was not natural but due to a touch of papier poudré, but he thought no worse of her for that. She had an elegance which did not belong to many mothers of the men he knew. Impossible to believe that she had once cooked his father's meals in a little Brixton villa, and dressed on twenty pounds a year, as often she reminded Janet! . . . It was funny that Janet's hair should be straw-coloured when his mother's was as dark as Audrey Nye's.

"You're looking fine to-night," he said, with admiration in his eyes.

She went into his room and closed the door, and stood looking at him with smiling but reproachful eyes.

"You needn't try to flatter me into a good temper, sonny. I'm going to have it out with you—straight!"

"What on earth do you mean, mother?"

He was startled by her touch of temper.

"Surely you're not fussing because I've come down from Oxford?"

"No," she said, "not that, though I'm ashamed of you for being so foolish, and worrying poor old Dad. I mean something worse than that, Julian. Past the limit, in my opinion."

Julian cast about in his mind for some grievous crime

he might have committed. Debts? Well, he owed a bit in Oxford, but not enough to alarm his mother. She was a bit of a spender too. And anyhow how did she know? Getting drunk one night at the Oxford Carlton? No, she couldn't have heard of that, and after all it might happen once in a life time to the most self-respecting man.

"Haven't an idea!" he said. "What's your worry, mother?"

"If you don't know, you ought to. That's all. I was at the Iffields' this afternoon. The Major told me he had met you at Henley. He said there was a girl with you—Audrey Nye. You were staying the night together at the White Hart."

"It's just like that rasper to go prattling," said Julian scornfully. "I suspected him of being rather a blighter, in spite of his D.S.O. in the dear old war. But what's the matter, anyway?"

Mrs. Perryam raised her brown eyebrows.

"You don't think it matters? Well, I jolly well do, my lad! I wasn't brought up on the Old Testament like Grandpa, but I do believe in keeping straight. And I've always taught you to be clean and decent. I thought I could trust you, young man."

"Good Heavens!" said Julian. "Why all this tragic talk because I walk from Oxford to Henley with a very nice kid? What's come over you, mother? I didn't think you were one of that sort."

"Nor am I," said Mrs. Perryam. "If you mean one of the old cats always interfering with young people, and spoiling their fun. I've given Janet plenty of rope, and you too, Julian, God knows! But I draw the line at this kind of thing."

"What kind of thing?"

"The thing I'm talking about. You and that girl. The creature!"

"For Heaven's sake," said Julian with desperation, "what *is* this absurd idea at the back of your head, mother?"

She became angry with him suddenly.

"Don't be impudent, Julian. I won't stand it. You admit

going about with that girl. Major Iffield saw you go upstairs together. He let the cat out of the bag."

"I'll break that man's head," said Julian fiercely.

"And you don't even trouble to hide the giddy scandal of it!" said Mrs. Perryam. "It will be all about the countryside before the week's out. A nice thing! What can the servants think of you when they find your pyjamas wrapped up with a girl's night things, and hair brushes and handkerchiefs, and I don't know what?"

Julian laughed loudly, his voice rising to a shrill note of mirth in which there was a hint of anger.

"Well, I'm blessed! That's the way scandal is made. The most innocent affair twisted into something abominable. Lives wrecked because of suspicious, creepy-crawly minds. What mid-Victorian ideas you must have, mother! As if a fellow couldn't go out for a walk with a well-brought-up girl, without any nonsense about it. Mother, I'm ashamed of you! I thought you were broader minded. Especially seeing the free and easy way in which you let Janet go on!"

Mrs. Perryam looked relieved, and a little ashamed of herself. "Oh, well—if you say there's nothing in it!"

"I do," said Julian.

"But, look here, sonny! Surely you're old enough to understand—"

"No," he said passionately. "And I hope I never shall be old enough to understand the miserable, morbid, unhealthy code under which the last generation seems to have been brought up. We've got beyond all that sort of nonsense. Men and girls of to-day aren't always worrying about what people think and fussing over the sex question. For Heaven's sake give us credit for a little decency and self-respect."

"But Julian, old dear, that girl's things—why were they wrapped up with yours? You can't tell me that is quite decent."

"I do tell you," said Julian.

His mother was silent, with a little smile about her lips.

"I can't understand you young people," she said presently. "Perhaps you're different. Janet says you *are* dif-

ferent, all of you. And yet human nature doesn't change. It's difficult to speak frankly on these things, but when I was a girl—not such ages ago either—"

Julian laughed again, and put his arm round his mother.

"That's the trouble with you," he said. "You don't understand that human nature has changed, or at least its ideas. You're all suffering from inhibitions, suppressed thoughts, all kinds of horrors due to Queen Victoria and the literature of her appalling period. We're free of all that. We're natural again. We do what we like without worrying about Mother Grundy. Because we're not afraid of things no harm is done. See?"

"It's jolly dangerous," said Mrs. Perryam. "One reads frightful things about young people in the papers. Besides I'm not so old as all that. I know things in my own nature—"

She gave a sidelong glance at her son and blushed a little. Then she added something hurriedly.

"Janet scares the wits out of me sometimes. She laughs at everything I tell her."

"Oh, Janet knows how to look after herself," said Julian carelessly. "And if she doesn't, I'll take care to open her eyes. Trust me."

"You two!" said Mrs. Perryam with a comical laugh. "Your father and I are just slaves to you. Well, it's no use fussing, I suppose."

"Not a bit," said Julian.

She put her arms about him and kissed his forehead.

"As long as you don't make a mess of things, sonny! You know I love every hair of your head. Only I wish you wouldn't use so much brilliantine!"

She gave him a little pat on the cheek and slipped out of the room.

Julian went to his window and leaned out with his elbows on the ledge and his face in his hands, staring into the garden with its dark trees touched by a faint moonlight, and its stone terrace gleaming white beyond the shadow of the house.

"Literature!" he said. "But what about Life?"

IX

AUDREY'S arrival home was by taxi cab from Guildford station to the old vicarage at Hartland near Clandon, a distance of five miles, at a cost of ten shillings. Having saved her fare to town, she considered that she was justified in this expense, although undoubtedly there would be a fuss about it if her mother discovered the extravagance. Anyhow her swollen ankle was a good justification.

She had not that easy mind, unconscious of moral turpitude, which enabled Julian to face his parents with bland tranquillity. The announcement that she had been sent down from Oxford would not be received as an insignificant affair. Her mother had "bucked" a good deal about "my dear daughter at Somerville" to all the old frumps of the surrounding neighbourhood. Her father had reduced his smoking allowance and sold some of his rare books as a help to the payment of her fees and her pocket money. Poor, adorable Dad! The frigid economies of a country vicarage, always of the bread-and-scrape order, ever since she could remember, and especially since the war, had become still more austere as a consequence of her University career. Even the two babes, Julia and Celia, aged ten and twelve, had suffered in the restriction of jam, pocket money, and other creature comforts, because their eldest sister was to do brilliant things at Oxford before getting an appointment as a High School mistress. O parental ambitions and illusions! What a crash there would be when she told her awful news. Impossible to give the details of that last little binge with the boys when certainly she had drunk too many cocktails, broken through a college window after hours, and trampled on Beatrice Tuck's blobby nose. Impossible to justify the hilarious adventures of youth to a mother who was very strict on the smaller proprieties and to an unpractical, other-worldly father who lived continu-

ally in the presence of God, who looked at life with the eyes of a smiling mystic, and exalted womanhood by his adoration of the Virgin Mother.

Audrey refused in her soul to admit that she should have done otherwise than as she did. She had done nothing mean, nothing beastly, nothing dishonourable. She had merely grabbed at the fun of life with both hands and enjoyed natural liberty with an orgy of laughter. The boys and girls had given her a good time. The boys especially had been frightfully good to her and all that was decent. It was true that Clatworthy had been rather inclined to go off the deep end and she had had to restrain his over passionate advances and outrageous sense of humour. Some episodes with that young man had been embarrassing, she was bound to admit, but harmless and entertaining. There was nothing base about Johnny Clatworthy. As for Julian Perryam, the very angels of heaven would have been edified by his correct behaviour. He had the quiet courtesy of one of Arthur's knights, the purity of St. Louis of France. That evening when she had offered him her cheek in the White Hart Inn, he had kissed her with almost ridiculous indifference. She ought not to have done that perhaps! But after all, why not be simple and friendly and natural? She had wanted that kiss. It was a good touch to the end of a perfect day, and he looked so handsome and brotherly and boyish standing there fumbling in the knapsack for her pyjamas. She gave a little gulp of laughter at the reminiscence and then wondered again how she could possibly explain these things to her father and mother. There would be a dreadful row.

The open taxi, which was an imported Ford, was driven by young Fred Hibbard, who had once sung in the choir with her and grinned at her attempts to teach Old Testament history in the Sunday School. She sat next to him on the front seat and chatted a little, after remarking on the glorious clumps of gold where the gorse was like a miracle.

"Any local news, Fred?"

He smiled shyly, with his gaze on the road.

"Not much, Miss. Lord Pervical has put the old Hall up for sale. Can't stand the taxes and all that."

"That's rotten! All the old estates are going. England's coming down in the world."

"Looks like it. And Colonel Mont is breaking up his park for building lots. Tearing down the trees something frightful. Spoiling the country side."

"What a ghastly shame! I'd like to shoot people who cut down trees like that!"

"I suppose they want the money. Times are hard for the gentry just now. Never be the same again in my opinion. The war has to be paid for. Pity it was ever started. They won't get *me* again."

Audrey laughed. "Too late to go back on that, Fred. Seen my father lately?"

"Yes. Took him to Guildford the other day to sell some more of his books. A rare stock of 'em he must have. There's nothing he doesn't know, I daresay."

"Just a few things," said Audrey. "I'm one of them."

"I see your brother's home again. Lost his job, so they say at the Onslow Arms."

"What! Out of a job again? That's perfectly awful!"

Audrey laughed rather ruefully. If Frank had got the sack from the Bank it would make things more difficult for her. Two black sheep in one flock were rather too many! Poor old Dad! He would be fearfully worried and become more mystical than ever. And Mother would fret and fuss at having the boy hanging about again. Frank was certainly the limit. She had never believed he would stick it out in the Bank. He hated office work like poison. And who could expect otherwise of a boy who had been a Wing Commander and flown over German battlefields before he was nineteen, and played tricks in the sky like a young Mercury? A Bank! With caged wings. He was never happy unless he was out of doors, sloping about with tramps and village boys, consorting with gipsies, yarning in the bar parlours of country inns, and making queer friends anywhere he could find them between Surrey and the Sussex Downs.

"Well, good afternoon, Fred, and here's something for yourself."

Audrey braced herself for coming troubles, and walked bravely up the weed grown path to the square-built Georgian house with a stone portico and two pillars with crumbling plaster which was her father's vicarage. She had lived here for most of her life since her father had been a curate in a London slum which she remembered vaguely as a place of brightly lighted shops, clanging tram-cars, shouting costers, and large gin palaces outside which frowsy women gathered with their perambulators. That was Walworth, to which her father looked back as an earthly Paradise because of the work he had done there in "soul saving." He deplored his lack of opportunities among the week-end cottages and golf bungalows of this Surrey village.

"The villa plot to sow and reap, to act the villa lie,
Beset with villa fears to live, midst villa dreams to die!"

The hall door was open as usual, and one of her father's old black hats hung on the pegs inside the passage. But she knew he was out by the absence of his blackthorn stick from the umbrella stand. One of Frank's caps was there, and by a cigarette end lying on the worn oilcloth she knew that her brother was about. How shabby everything looked! How poverty-stricken, after the polished floors and solid comfort of Somerville! Though it was May and the sun was shining again after the morning rain, the old winter curtains draped the windows—a dark and gloomy green—and the house smelt damp, like a graveyard, Audrey thought, with spirits that suddenly sank to zero. But after flinging her blue hat on a hall chair, and pushing her hair back from her forehead, she called out with deliberate cheerfulness:

"Hulloa, everybody! Who's at home?"

The little maid, a girl of sixteen whom Mrs. Nye had engaged for economy's sake on low wages in return for training, opened the kitchen door with a startled look.

"Good gricious, Miss Audrey! You back?"

"Back for good, Lizzie. Where are they all?"

"The master's round at church," said the girl. "And mistress is talking in the drawing-room with Miss Raven, and Master Frank"— here she gave a little giggle—"is oiling his motor-bike in the back garden."

Audrey shuddered at the thought of Miss Raven in the drawing-room and made a dart for the back door with a little low whistle to her brother.

Frank was sitting on an upturned wheelbarrow by the greenhouse, in a pair of khaki breeches, much oil-stained, and an old blue shirt, open at the front. He was smoking a cigarette and regarding the disintegrated portions of an ancient "Indian." An old wire-haired terrier lay in an attitude of *couchant regardant*. This brother of Audrey's was a reddish haired fellow with a square cut face and whimsical mouth, and soft brown eyes like a young deer's.

"Hullo, kid!" he said, without much surprise. "What's the matter with *you?*"

Audrey took one of his cigarettes and tousled his hair a little.

"Everything's the matter! I've been sent down from Somerville for disorderly behaviour!"

She gave a little squeal of laughter, but with a nervous note in it.

"Good for you," said Frank calmly. "Another rebel in the family. Won't our parents be pleased?"

"I hear you've chucked the Bank, old boy. What the dickens will you do now?"

"The Bank chucked me," corrected her brother. "I don't blame them at all. I made a most elaborate mess of their books, and the end came when I drew a Sopwith Scout, 1918 type, on the inside cover of my ledger. Pure absent-mindedness, as the governor would say."

"Things are approaching a blood-curdling crisis," said Audrey.

They reached the crisis after the departure of Miss Raven whose big boots made a scrunching noise down the gravel, so conveying the news of her exit to Audrey's quick ears. Mrs. Nye started up with a little cry, not of pleasure, but

of pained surprise, when Audrey made a rapid appearance in the drawing-room with a cheery greeting and a plea for tea.

"Audrey! What in the world brings you back? And what is this dreadful scandal I hear from Miss Raven?"

Mrs. Nye was a delicate lady, who ought to have been dressed in lavender silk with a lace cap, but wore instead a blue serge coat and skirt and a little black hat. Twenty-three years as a clergyman's wife in difficult parishes—she remembered with something like terror the squalor of that Walworth parish—had made her white-haired before her time and had given her a look of perpetual worry. She was very popular with other clergymen's wives because of her untiring energy in the cause of the Girls' Friendly Society and her unerring sense of tact with the parishioners. She had trained large numbers of young girls as domestic servants who were quite a boon to the big houses in Surrey where they took good places as parlour maids until they got into trouble with the local shop-boys, and she still found time to maintain a regular correspondence with old school friends, to whom she quoted passages from the letters of Madame de Sévigné, the discourses of Fénelon, the poems of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and other works which had developed her moral character and sense of duty at the very select school for young ladies in Clapham Park where she had been one of the favourite girls. Audrey acknowledged in her generous moments that her mother was as near perfection as any woman could be while belonging to this wicked world, but in moments of impatience she had gone as far as blaming God because she was born with a mother who was distressed at the least untidiness, shocked at the smallest impropriety, and alarmed at the first hint of that natural depravity which even as a child had lured Audrey into dangerous, joyous, and devilish adventures.

Audrey's skill in tactics took advantage instantly of her mother's reference to Miss Raven.

She gave ground which was quite untenable and covered her weak position by a bold attack upon the enemy's position.

"I've been sent down, Mother, for a somewhat injudicious

rag. But what it has to do with that cat Miss Raven I fail utterly to see. Another dreadful scandal, eh? Why, the woman would sniff a prehistoric scandal in the mummy room at the British Museum! She's a pest to the neighbourhood. She ought to be suppressed with poison gas or something!"

At ordinary times Mrs. Nye would have been lured off the main track by this somewhat violent assault upon one of the most energetic helpers in the parish. But Audrey perceived instinctively that in this case she could not obtain that argumentative relief.

"My dear," said Mrs. Nye, "it's a most terrible shock that you have been sent down."

"I thought it would be," said Audrey, helping herself to tea.

"You know how we have stinted and scraped to keep you at the University—"

"Yes," said Audrey. "And I notice it's the same old bread and scrape for tea!"

"Your poor father has even denied himself tobacco for your sake."

"Poor old Daddy!" said Audrey, attacking the cake.

Mrs. Nye looked at her daughter with timid eyes.

"Audrey, there's something far more dreadful I want to speak about. Something I must ask you—"

"Ask anything you like, mother dear," said Audrey patiently. She racked her mind, as Julian had done, for any sin which might have poked up its ugly little head in the light of day. There was that episode with Johnny Clatworthy. No, foolish as it had been, there was nothing in it. Absolutely nothing. Beatrice Tuck's expansive and ridiculous nose? Well, there was nothing very dreadful in having trodden on it. It might improve it. Too many cocktails? Well, of course it was a bad habit, and she had certainly been rather merry once, but surely mother couldn't have heard of that?

"My dearest child," said Mrs. Nye, in an almost shamefaced way, "I hate to put this question to you, but I feel that I should be hiding my head in the sand like an ostrich if I didn't face the truth whatever it may be."

The idea of her mother hiding her head in the sand like an ostrich had a curiously hysterical effect upon Audrey, and she laughed with ripples of mirth which she tried to check when she saw her mother's eyes fill with tears.

"My wild Audrey!" said Mrs. Nye. "I pray God to protect you from your own love of adventure, your sense of fun! It's so dangerous. It leads young girls into so many temptations. I tremble to think that what Miss Raven suggests may contain even a grain of truth."

"What on earth *does* the creature suggest?" asked Audrey with impatient enquiry.

"She says that she met you at a village near Oxford—in the company of a young man."

"Profoundly true," said Audrey. "'What about it,' as the poet says?"

"You actually contemplated walking to London together—"

"It didn't come off," said Audrey. "My ankle gave out."

"Miss Raven tells me she met a gentleman named Major Iffield at Victoria station, who mentioned that he had seen you both at Henley. Audrey! My dear child! Have you gone mad or something? I implore you to tell me what has happened—what you have been doing with that young man."

Audrey did not answer the question in a direct way. She drew her brown eyebrows together and hoped "devoutly," she said, but with suppressed ferocity, that she might have the pleasure of seeing Miss Raven roast at the stake, or boil in oil, or hang in chains on Gibbet Hill. She regretted that the ducking stool and other methods of popular punishment had been abandoned by the increase of sentimentality in the modern mind. As for the facts of the case, she was willing for all the world to know that she had walked to Henley with a Balliol boy and, if he liked, would walk as far as Hell with him. After which outburst of anger and oratory Audrey departed to her room, leaving her mother a prey to the deepest anxiety.

X

AUDREY'S father arrived home in time for supper with a guest who had not been notified to his wife so that there was only cold mutton with rice pudding to follow.

This was characteristic of Mr. Nye, who was both impulsive and absent-minded, in spite of twenty-three years of protest and training from the lady whom he had married when she was a demure maid with big brown eyes, a rosebud mouth, and a strong will of her own. On more than one occasion when he had duly announced that he had invited a friend to dinner—"It all adds to the expense, my dear," Mrs. Nye had said a hundred times—he had forgotten all about it and gone off parish-poking, as he called the visits to his flock, or had remained in prayer in the Lady chapel of his own church, or had gone for a long solitary walk so exalted by the beauty of the woods and fields and by the mystical joy which came to him in the songs of birds, the smell of the earth, and the immanence of the Divine Spirit in all living things, that he was hopelessly late for the evening meal.

This evening he appeared a few minutes before supper with a young Catholic priest whom Audrey recognised as a man she had seen bicycling about the country lanes between Haslemere and Guildford. Once or twice he had smiled at her in a simple friendly way which she had rather liked. He was introduced by Mr. Nye as Father Rivington, and Audrey noticed that when he took his seat at their rather bare board he made a little sign of the cross on his breast, as though twiddling with his coat button. He had an easy, pleasant, boyish manner, and seemed to take at once to Frank, who sloped in with the wire-haired terrier at his heels, sat at the end of the table rather noisily, and surveyed the cold mutton with hostile eyes as though regarding an ancient enemy. The two small girls, Julia and

Celia, took their places opposite Audrey, flinging their flaxen pigtails over their shoulders and continuing some intellectual quarrel on the subject of home lessons.

"Not so much chatter, you kids," said Audrey. "Cheek of you to stay up so late. I wasn't allowed to at your age."

"No," said Julia, aged twelve. "But times are changing, old dear."

It was extremely characteristic of Audrey's father that he did not show the least surprise at her presence and had obviously forgotten that she was supposed to be absorbing the higher learning as supplied to ladies at Oxford. It was not until half way through the meal that he suddenly laid down his knife and fork and said, "God bless my soul, Audrey, what are you doing here?"

Mrs. Nye, respecting the proprieties as usual, and wishing to avoid anything like a family discussion before a stranger, answered the enquiry by saying that Audrey had returned suddenly for certain reasons which were no doubt unavoidable.

"Not unwell, sweetheart?" asked Mr. Nye, rather mystified by this explanation, and looking anxiously from his wife to Audrey.

"Never better, father. At the top of my form," answered Audrey, ignoring Frank's indiscreet chuckle, and his undisguised wink.

"Splendid! . . . And as I was saying, my dear sir"—this to Father Rivington—"there is not the slightest doubt in my mind that modern civilisation is doomed unless there's a quickening of spiritual influence among the masses. That's where the Roman Church has a pull over the Anglican. You get more directly into touch with your people. I don't know how it is, but the sacraments, the call of the faith itself, especially the devotion to Our Lady, perhaps, do away with the necessity of all that parish entertainment, whist drives, bazaar-begging, sermon advertising, and vulgar touting, by which so many of my fellow clergymen try to allure folk to attend their services."

Father Rivington answered politely, and accepted the

fact that his Church relied on authority and spiritual desire rather than on publicity. At the same time he had to confess that he had tried to raise a bit of money himself to pay off the debt on a new church in just those ways which Mr. Nye condemned. He laughed at this admission in a hearty boyish way, and then, as though wishing to avoid ecclesiastical small talk at the supper table, turned to Frank and asked if he had been in the war.

"I had a glimpse of it," said Frank.

"Infantry?"

"Flying."

It appeared that Father Rivington had been a military chaplain and he and Frank were soon discussing places they knew in France and Flanders, and especially, Audrey noticed, certain villages behind the lines where they had obtained good food served by girls named Suzanne, Marguérite, Yvonne, and Berthe.

"Good old days," said Frank, lifting a glass of cold water as though pledging a toast. "Here's to the next jolly old war!"

Father Rivington laughed heartily, but entirely disapproved of the sentiment.

"I hope there aren't many like you. . . . I'm a pacifist and a League of Nations man, out and out."

"Oh, Lord!" said Frank. "That tosh?"

Mr. Nye intervened in the argument that followed when Frank reiterated his bloodthirsty desire for another Armageddon which he thought would relieve the strain of peace.

"My son is feeling a bit unsettled still. Can't find the right career. Eh, Frank?"

"Not in a city Bank," said Frank. "I'd rather be riddled with machine gun bullets in a bloody little scrap."

"Hush, my dear," said Mrs. Nye. "I wish you young people wouldn't be so violent in your expressions. Especially in the presence of a guest."

"He doesn't mind," growled Frank, with a whimsical glance at the young priest. "He's been a padre at the front. He's used to violent expressions, of a sanguinary colour."

"Frank, I beg of you!"

Father Rivington laughed again, in his high, ringing way.

"I'm not easily shocked, Mrs. Nye. In fact my own language sometimes, in moments of irritation, is of a most military character."

"It's the spirit of a man that counts," said Mr. Nye. "Give me a man with love in his heart, and he can swear like a trooper as far as I'm concerned. Why, I knew a coster once—a regular saint—with every other word an oath. One of the most Christlike men."

"John dear, your tolerance is sometimes extraordinary."

"Where Love is, there God is also," said Mr. Nye heartily.

Audrey smiled to herself, and then shared her smile with Frank when she caught his eye. The dear old Dad was incurable as a cheerful mystic. How he managed to retain his faith was a mystery to them, in the face of so many knocks and disillusions. Not even their irreverence and scepticism had shaken his simple faith in the miracles of the Old Testament, including Jonah in the whale's belly, Balaam's ass, and the stopping of the sun in favour of Joshua. Not all their patient or impatient allusions to the destructive criticism as developed by Oxford undergraduates with the help of Matthew Arnold, Anatole France, and H. G. Wells, could alter his profound belief in the efficacy of prayer, and in the communion of saints. He was an absolute mediævalist. However, for once in a way they were grateful for this. It avoided the necessity of painful explanations and further worry in Audrey's case, because Mr. Nye retired into his study for private conversation with Father Rivington—something to do with the parish, no doubt—and remained there until nearly bedtime. This was accepted as providential by Frank, who had arranged to meet a friend at the Wheatsheaf and strolled out of the house immediately after supper for that purpose—after a little tug at Julia's pigtail and a friendly tweak of Celia's nose and a noisy scuffle in the hall.

Unfortunately for Audrey her mother was a lady who never delegated her duties to servants unless under her immediate supervision, and this led to a discovery which

Audrey considered perfectly ridiculous when Mrs. Nye came downstairs after a prolonged absence with an air of extreme uneasiness, approaching dismay.

"Audrey, dear, I've been looking for your luggage to unpack. You don't seem to have brought a thing with you!"

"No, mother," said Audrey, looking up from the pages of *Punch*. "It's all being sent on from Somerville."

"But your night things, dearest? How did you manage last night?"

"Oh, Lord, yes!" said Audrey. "I forgot. Julian Perryam shoved them into his knapsack. I left them with him."

A faint flush crept into the pale cheeks of Mrs. Nye, and there was a look of something like terror in her tired eyes.

"Audrey, have you no shame?"

"Not much, mother dear. It's an old-fashioned habit. But why?"

"Your night things in a young man's bag!" said Mrs. Nye breathlessly.

"There was plenty of room in it," said Audrey.

"A young man with whom you stayed in a country hotel! This is beyond words. I shall have to tell your poor father. I am horrified—terror-striken."

"Look here, mother," said Audrey with a savage little laugh, "please spare yourself all such ridiculous horrors and terrors. They make me rather tired. They belong to the High School in Clapham Park thirty years ago, and not to Somerville and the twentieth century. Tell father by all means. He has far too much trust in me to worry his head about it. And meanwhile I'm off to bed. I can't stand all this morbid suspicion any longer."

She took *Punch* with her and went past her mother with an angry light in her eyes, for the second time that day.

It was just about the time when Julian shouted out to his mother, "For heaven's sake, give us credit for a little decency and self-respect!"

XI

AUDREY was reading in bed, having switched off her light when she heard her mother going up the corridor—and switched it on again when she heard her mother's bedroom door safely shut. By that subterfuge she avoided a moral protest against the waste of electric light, followed by the usual rebuke: "How often have I begged you not to read in bed, Audrey dearest? You never respect the slightest word I say. And those abominable novels. . . ."

She was startled later by a tap at the door and her father's voice.

"Still awake, Audrey? Can I have a word with you?"

"A million words, father. Come in."

Mr. Nye came in and closed the door quietly.

"I don't want to keep you awake, Kiddy," he said, "but your mother's greatly distressed about you."

"Yes," said Audrey. "She's making a habit of it."

Mr. Nye smiled, and then looked serious again. "I know. But I confess I'm rather alarmed by what she tells me this time. In fact I may say I'm scared to death, my dear."

"Oh, rats, father!"

"Not altogether rats," said Mr. Nye, mildly. "What on earth is all this about your gadding about the countryside with a young man—after being sent down from Somerville? The last fact is enough to turn my hair grey, on top of so much other worry with Frank and all that. A most dreadful disappointment. But it pales into insignificance before the thought that you've been falling into bad ways. Playing with fire! My darling little Audrey! I hope to God—"

Audrey sat up in bed and flung the two plaits into which she had tied her hair—reminiscent of Julia and Celia with their pigtails—over her shoulders with an impatient gesture.

"My dear Daddy, for Heaven's sake don't be parsonical with me. Mother's bad enough, and it's no good arguing with her, because she's encrusted in early Victorian propriety. But I do expect more understanding from you. More sense of humour. Surely you know me well enough to be assured that I can take care of myself!"

"I've always hoped so," said Mr. Nye. "Subject to the usual limitations of human nature and a wild spirit, my dear. But you must admit it's not discreet, to say the least of it, to wander about the countryside with a young fellow who may be a dissolute scoundrel for all I know."

"Well, let me inform you," said Audrey smiling, "that he's not a dissolute scoundrel, but a most charming youth, *sans peur et sans reproche!*"

"And nothing serious has happened between you? You are still my little pure and innocent flower?"

Audrey laughed outright at this simple question.

"I'm all right, father. Unspotted as the lily and all that."

"Thank God!" said Mr. Nye, with an air of intense relief.

"But not as innocent as a blue-eyed doll, father! We're brought up in a different code from the young people of your early days, thank goodness! If you haven't found that out yet you must go about the world with your eyes shut."

Mr. Nye thrust a hand through his curly chestnut hair and looked absurdly young to be Audrey's father.

"I go about the world astonished, shocked, and terrified, by its sinfulness, its irreligion, and its defiance of God," he said, not gloomily, but as an alarming fact. "It was the war that did it. It broke down all laws. It liberated primitive instincts. It smashed the old barriers of restraint imposed by the social code if not by the Christian faith."

"A jolly good thing too," said Audrey with the calm assurance of youth. "It has liberated human nature which was shut up in artificial conventions and blinded by blinkers. We're looking at the truth of things without fear. We're not going to let the joy of life be spoilt by silly old restrictions and blue funk. Why, father, you and mother are full of quaking terrors—terror of God, terror of life, terror of

public opinion, terror of laughter, terror of youth. It must be miserable for you."

Mr. Nye laughed with a groan in his voice.

"Quite true! I'm a bit of a coward. But it's because I've seen the fearful dangers of the world around—and in my own heart. The old words have not lost their truth, my dear. 'The devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.' 'The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.' "

"Not yours, Dad. You're one of the saints, alas. As for the old devil, I say pooh to him. Also bah! I don't believe in him. He's a silly old myth belonging to the dark of the mind."

Mr. Nye shook his head.

"I've no difficulty whatever in believing in only one devil. Look at the world to-day. Look at Europe—plagued by all the devils of hate, greed, lies, immorality, cruelty. And I have only to look in my own heart. You say I'm a saint. Why, my dear child, I'm a pest-house of iniquity!"

He made this assertion with a kind of cheerful emphasis.

Audrey laughed gaily, looking at his ascetic face, and his troubled boyish eyes.

"Do you imagine I don't know what temptation is?" he asked. "Don't forget that a young clergyman with any pretensions to good looks is surrounded by admiring women and that if he's in the least degree susceptible he's in constant danger. As a young man, in spite of your dear mother, I had some very narrow escapes, old kid. Hair-breadth escapes! I tremble at the thought of them."

Audrey regarded him with considerable enjoyment.

"I bet mother kept a sharp eye on you! And don't put it all down to the admiring females, father. In spite of your sanctity and your middle age, you're a terrific flirt, even now. How's Mrs. Middleton getting on? Have you been to hold her hand lately and listen to her spiritual adventures?"

Mr. Nye's face deepened in colour.

"Audrey! For goodness' sake, dear child, don't jest so lightly about things like that! Mrs. Middleton is a very

charming woman, but as a matter of fact I've given up calling on her. One can't be too careful, I acknowledge, at whatever time of life."

"Then there's Mrs. Harbord," said Audrey slyly. "Mother was rather worried about that little lady! And no blame to her either."

"Hush!" said Mr. Nye, greatly embarrassed. "I tried to help the poor lady after her divorce. I pointed out her sinfulness—frankly and kindly—but she became a perfect nuisance to me with her coy seductive ways."

"Oh, father!" said Audrey with mock gravity. "Playing with fire! And you dare to lecture me!"

He swept her teasing suggestions away with a sudden gesture of impatience.

"Joking apart, old girl, it's because I've had some experience of these things—my own weakness, as I tell you frankly—that I tremble for you sometimes, and feel very much afraid. You young people of to-day take enormous risks, gaily, in a spirit of adventure, without a glance or thought for the consequences. My dear, you're not immune from danger. The adventure ends disastrously sometimes —many times. As a clergyman—if my lips were not sealed —I could tell you dreadful stories—dreadful—of young boys and girls in this very neighbourhood. Ruined lives. Marriages in a hurry. Poor little broken hearts that only God Himself can mend again, as certainly He will hereafter, with infinite pity."

"Servant girls," said Audrey. "Poor little country sluts who have never had their eyes opened."

"No," said Mr. Nye gravely. "Girls like you, Audrey. Girls from good families."

"Rotters," protested Audrey. "Dirty little decadents."

"Girls like you, Audrey," said Mr. Nye again. "As pretty as you. Once as joyous as you."

He sat on the side of her bed and took her hand and put it to his lips.

"Life *is* full of terrors," he said. "You're quite right, my dear. Middle aged folk, like your mother and me, have no sense of security in our hearts. We walk with fear

because of you young people—so rebellious, so daring, so resentful of advice and restraint. Look at Frank. Out of a job again. A haunter of public houses."

"Frank's all right," said Audrey, loyal to her brother. "Perfectly normal and healthy."

"He shirks work," said Mr. Nye. "What's going to become of him? Does he expect me to keep him for ever, eating the bread of idleness? It's a disgrace in the village, for one thing. 'Look at the parson's son,' they say, 'hanging about at a loose end again. A pity he wasn't better taught!' That's not pleasant for me. And God knows I've been patient with him and enormously tolerant."

"He'll find the right kind of job one of these days," said Audrey. "After all, he did serve his country in time of war and help to save little old England. He deserves time to look around."

Mr. Nye sighed and rumpled his curly hair again.

"Time's getting on. It's four years since the war ended."

"Well, it's not easy to get a job that's any good," said Audrey. "Meanwhile this old house is large enough to give him free lodging while he looks about."

Mr. Nye kissed the blue bow on one of her plaits.

"I can't afford to keep idle sons or idle daughters. You're my latest source of anxiety, Audrey. You know how we economised to send you to Somerville on the high road to a brilliant career which might have enabled you to pay back a little. Now that hope's dashed."

"I'm saving you money," said Audrey, audaciously. "Somerville was beastly expensive."

Mr. Nye glanced at her doubtfully.

"One of these days," he said, "you and Frank will have to keep your poor mother. Perhaps sooner than you expect!"

There was a look of mystery in his eyes.

Audrey smiled rather callously.

"Now, father, don't you ask me to believe you feel the hand of death on you, or any sob-stuff of that kind. You know the doctor examined you the other day and said you were as fit as a fiddle."

"It's not that," said Mr. Nye, with suppressed excitement. "It's something else which I'm afraid will make us all very, very poor. I didn't want to tell you just yet, and I must ask you to say nothing whatever to mother."

Audrey stared at him with a comical look.

"Good gracious! You've not been gambling at Bridge or betting on the three-thirty, or anything like that, have you, father?"

A humorous smile played round his mouth and he shook his head.

"That's not one of my little vices. A mug's game, as they used to say in Walworth."

"And you haven't been getting into debt over some wicked woman, greedy for pearl necklaces and crême de menthe? Father, I'll disown you for ever if you've been leading a double life!"

"In a way I have," he said. "A double life! But not according to the flesh. A clergyman of the Church of England, trying to do his duty faithfully, loyally, but with his heart and faith elsewhere."

Audrey for the first time began to take him seriously. She saw that he was deeply moved by some secret and disturbing thought, and that his eyes were shining with a kind of interior light.

"Good Lord, father, you haven't become an infidel like me? That would be very awkward."

"Not an infidel," said Mr. Nye, with a queer boyish laugh. "A more perfect faith, more intense, more satisfying."

"Not a Spiritualist, or a Christian Scientist, I hope? There's rather a spooky look about you, Dad, now I come to look at you. I believe you've been dabbling in black magic! It's that woman, Mrs. Harbord, with her séances and Oliver Lodge stuff."

Mr. Nye shook his head and dismissed all such ideas with a wave of his hand.

"Audrey, my dear, I'm going to tell you a great secret. A most joyous secret, though it will lead to suffering for all of us, I'm afraid, and especially for your dear mother.

I'm going to become a Catholic and join the only true Church. I've been thinking about it for a long time. I can hesitate no longer. To-night I put myself in the hands of Father Rivington."

"Good God!" said Audrey. "That puts the lid on everything. Do you mean to say you're going to chuck up your living?"

"I must, my dear. It's God's will."

"It's a damned outrage," said Audrey. "It will kill mother. Father, I think you've gone dotty or something. It's that absurd young priest with his hyena laugh and mask of frank simplicity. I expect he's a Jesuit in disguise!"

"He's not a Jesuit," said Mr. Nye, "and not in disguise. And it's nothing much to do with him. The idea has been growing in my mind ever since the war. Suddenly I saw the flaming truth of it in a little wood where I was walking the other day. A fairy glade. You know that avenue of beeches near Effingham? Like the aisle of a cathedral, but all green with the new leaves. It came upon me like a great illumination as I was looking at the bluebells with their wonderful colour, like Our Lady's gown. 'What the world wants is faith,' I was saying, and then suddenly I knew that I had never had the real faith but only a compromise in a kind of half-way house. The great Catholic faith, with the authority of Peter, the miracles of all the saints, the love and pity of the Virgin Mother, the presence of Christ walking by one's side, so comradely—"

"Oh, shut up, father," said Audrey. "What absolute rot you do talk!"

"It's God's truth, little one," said her father. "And I want you to be brave about it and help your mother to bear it. When I give up my living I shall have to get some work to do, and it's not going to be easy at first. That's why I want you and Frank—"

Audrey gave a hysterical laugh.

"Three out-of-work people in one family! I get sent down from Oxford, Frank gets the sack from the Bank, and you chuck the Church! If that isn't the exaggerated

limit. . . . Well, there's always the workhouse, of course."

After that laughing outburst she sat up straight in bed and struck her hands on the coverlet.

"Father, for goodness' sake pull yourself together, old dear. You can't do this thing! It's too monstrously absurd. It's too farcical and outrageous even for a mediævalist like you—a dreamer, and idealist, and absent-minded beggar. Think what it will mean to all of us, and especially to mother. Grinding poverty. Horrible squalor. The loss of all your old friends. But poverty above all and worst of all."

"My lady Poverty!" said Mr. Nye. "We'll pay our homage to her like St. Francis of Assisi."

"When are you going to tell mother?" asked Audrey coldly.

"Not just yet. Not for a few days. I trust you to keep my secret, Kiddy."

"I shan't blab," said Audrey. "But I warn you, Dad, that if you don't get back to common sense I shan't take it lying down."

"I look to your comradeship, girlie. You and I have always been good pals. The best of pals. Like two sweethearts, you and I."

This appeal seemed to touch a sensitive chord in Audrey's heart.

"Oh, father!" she cried. "For goodness' sake—"

She did not finish her sentence but put her face down on the pillow and burst into tears.

"My dear, my dear!" said Mr. Nye.

He bent over and kissed her wet cheek and then tip-toed out of the room.

XII

JULIAN was seeking inspiration for a drama in blank verse on the subject of England after the Napoleonic Wars, later than Hardy's "Dynasts." He was going to use that as a basis for a satirical commentary on England after the European War—at least as a kind of historical comparison, with modern allusions. It was to be rather bitter, realistic and strong. Above all strong, with no pandering to sentiment except in certain lyrics which he would put in here and there dealing with the beauty of nature. Of course there would have to be a love interest, which was, he supposed, an absurd necessity, but he would subordinate that to the general drama of English life, with its unemployment, its miserable state of Labour, the beginning of the end of industrialism, and the new claims to Liberty. . . .

A great idea, but very difficult. It wanted a lot of thinking out after he had put down the general scheme on paper. He thought it out in long walks over Box Hill which was very quiet on a week-day though utterly useless as a place of inspiration on Saturdays and Sundays when its slopes were crowded with picnic parties who had come by motor bus or on motor bikes with side-cars from the London suburbs. It was difficult to work in the garden, though it was six acres in size with many pleasant nooks and sun swept lawns where he lay back in a deck chair with a notebook on his knees, and a Panama hat tilted over his eyes. His family seemed to regard his literary efforts with mingled amusement and suspicion. At least that was Janet's attitude. She frankly accused him of using the idea as a cloak for laziness and once or twice he was unlucky in being found fast asleep by her when inspiration was difficult and the sun warm. At other times she would come and sit by his side reading some ridiculous and rather indecent novel and look up now and again to say, "You don't seem to be getting on very fast, old boy!"

It was no wonder he lost his temper and said, "How the devil can I get on at all when you persist in interrupting my thoughts? Run away and play, little girl!"

His mother interrupted him with even greater levity, and accused him of being "unsociable" because he refused to go out to tea with her to neighbour's houses. She did not seem to take his literary efforts very seriously.

"You can't stick in the old garden all day, sonny! It'll do you good to see some nice people now and then."

He knew those nice people! They hadn't an idea beyond the servant problem and the abomination of the income tax, and the high cost of living.

Then there was Grandfather! With an almost devilish ingenuity, as though tracking down a criminal, he would come searching for Julian wherever he hid himself, behind a sheltering hedge, or in a distant summer house. Julian, jotting down a word here and there in his note-book, would hear his stick tapping down the garden path, and the old man's wheezing breath, before he appeared in his grey frock coat and trousers with a glint of triumph in his piercing old eyes at having found his quarry.

"Ah, there you are, Julian! I've been looking for you. They tell me you're writing a book. If I were you, I wouldn't, young man. There are too many books already, and mostly rubbish, nowadays."

Then he would sit down on a garden seat or a bank of grass with his thin old knees sharply outlined through his neatly pressed trousers, and make gloomy and querulous remarks.

"Your father was a fool to bring you up in luxury. Much better if you'd been made a boy clerk in a good business or the Civil Service. More honest. This is all show and sham, this great house and garden built up on cheap trash. No comfort in it, with servants always spying about, interfering. Servants! Your grandmother did her own cooking. A good woman, Julian, dear boy! Not like these modern females with their soft ways and loose notions. And look at all the unemployment, and Labour unrest and Bolshevism. What's the use of it? Laziness! Greed and

grab! No discipline. No respect. Take your own case. This book of yours. That's not work! Lying about a garden dreaming nonsense. Your father's too weak, that's what it is. I've told him so, a thousand times. Spare the rod, spoil the child. Good old words out of the good old Book. That sister of yours is turning out a young hussy, with cigarette smoking, and bare arms, and impudent ways with her old Grandfather. It's only yesterday I used to nurse her in my arms and stroke her golden curls, as soft as silk!—and tell her fairy stories. Now she's disrespectful! Your mother's fault, I dare say. She's all for society now, and forgetful of old friends. She has no fixed principles, and precious little morality, though you mustn't tell her I said so. What's that book about, young Julian?"

"Hell!" said Julian, exasperated beyond all patience.

"Ah," said the old man, "I'm not surprised.

Then there was the cuckoo.

Julian, worrying over his great idea, not getting on with it, heard the bird mocking at him. It seemed to have a cold in its throat, but all day long called "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" with damnable iteration, until once he flung his note-book away, sprang up, and said, "Curse you, you blasted bird!" enormously to the amusement of Janet who happened to be passing up the pergola.

He had a sense of being watched by his father, who had an exasperating habit of enquiring how he was getting on with his work—when he hadn't even begun the thing. As a refuge from all this family interest and vigilance he retired to his room after dinner and took to thinking things out at night, smoking many cigarettes. Generally the drift of his thoughts wandered away from his drama. He wondered what Clatworthy was doing, and whether Stokes Prichard had got his Blue, and whether he hadn't been rather a fool to leave Oxford, and what the latest Revues were like in London—the new edition of "The Co-Optimists," for instance. Then he became engrossed in "The Forsyte Saga" by Galsworthy and put his drama in blank verse on one side while he read it—and it was enormously long.

This made him late for breakfast in the morning and his father went off to his office before he was out of bed—another cause of grievance, as he heard from old Mary, who brought in his bacon and eggs at half-past ten.

"Your father's fretting because you're so late up, Master Julian. Thinks you must have caught the sleepy sickness or some think! 'Poor dear,' says I, 'let 'im 'ave 'is sleep out. It's natural for young blood.'"

"Quite right, Mary," said Julian. "The conservation of energy, it's called, in scientific language."

"Oh, well, you always was a one for long words. Always put me right when I used to read out Grimm's Fairy Tales, when you was just a nipper."

"Any letters, Mary?"

Yes, there was one from Audrey, a week after her return.

"A love-letter, I'll be bound," said old Mary, winking at her own image in the silver dish cover. She doted on "Master Julian" and thought him the handsomest fellow in the world, and indulged her imagination with amorous adventures in which he played the hero's part and wrought havoc among young ladies of high rank and enormous wealth.

Audrey's letter invited him to drive over one day as soon as the Metallurgique was restored to health and return her pyjamas, hair brushes, tooth brush and bedroom slippers.

"As long as they remain in your possession [she wrote] I'm in danger of scandalous imputations. Their presence in your knapsack has already led to domestic trouble of the gravest kind. I beg you not to return them by post, for if the parcel happens to break open the whole village will be convulsed by the shock of outraged propriety. Miss Raven—that hard-faced woman we met at Dorcester—would undoubtedly make a further report to my worried parents whom she has already informed of our comradely tramp. Oh, my dear Julian, how difficult it is for people of our years to escape from the awful heritage of our pre-war parentage! How splendid it will be for the children born of a post-war generation, liberated from the evil spell of Victorian and even of Edwardian stuffiness, looking at life through open windows of the soul, walking the road of adventure without fear of public opinion, and unchallenged in perfect freedom of thought going to meet laughter, gaiety and joy!

You might write me a verse or two on that inspiring theme. Anyhow redeem your promise of coming to see me. I am on the edge of a precipice which threatens to engulf my whole family owing to the fanaticism of a father who is determined to go off the deep end and drag his unfortunate people to the bottomless pit of poverty. It's really an appalling prospect, but so far a dead secret which I must ask you to keep unrevealed to a single soul.

Your sincere friend,

AUDREY NYE.

"P.S. I had a note from Clatworthy. He resents the imputation that he ran your car without oil. Also he announces the glad tidings that he has taken rooms in the Albany and proposes to paint London purple in the early autumn when he hopes to get a job in the Foreign Office."

Julian decided to walk over to Audrey's place in the afternoon, and return the pyjamas and other things which had been the innocent cause of scandal. They were neatly arranged in a little bundle on one of the chairs in his bedroom —that was his mother's doing, no doubt—and after lunch he made a brown paper parcel of them and tucked them under his arm. As luck would have it he met Janet in the hall and she regarded the parcel with amusement and curiosity, knowing his objection to being "a beast of burden" when called upon to go shopping with his mother or sister.

"Taking the clothes to the wash, old boy?" she asked with childish impertinence.

"Little girls should be seen and not heard," he answered stiffly.

Janet received this schoolboy back-chat with the laughing contempt it deserved.

"You're not strong at repartee, Julian, in spite of your Oxford training. And you needn't try and deceive your innocent sister. You're going off to that girl Audrey Nye with her abandoned underclothing. See what a piercing intelligence I have!"

Julian regarded her darkly.

"The number of spies there are in this house would make the reputation of Scotland Yard."

"Oh, we watch you a little," said Janet. "Our white-headed boy. The hope of the family, and a rising star in the literary firmament. Father's worrying himself into fid-

dlestrings about you. He thinks you're idling instead of putting in a decent day's work."

Julian flushed angrily.

"That's the idea, is it? Why doesn't he tell me so straight out, instead of holding family councils and listening to Grandfather's recollections of his poor but industrious youth?"

Janet was amused by his heated eloquence.

"Don't get rattled, Julian. I believe in your moral character and high intelligence. Trust your little sister!"

"I can't say I believe in yours," he answered rather savagely. "The way you carry on with that poisonous person, Cyril Buckland, makes my gorge rise. I warn you he's only playing with you, as he's played with other girls before he ruined them. I know something about his record."

Janet became a little pale, and the mocking smile left her face.

"That's a cad's thing to say, Julian. I thought you had a decent sense of good form."

He saw that he had hurt her more sharply than he meant.

"Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to put it so brutally. But I warn you to be careful, young lady. That fellow's a rotter. I've heard his talk after dinner, among men. It isn't pleasant."

"You're a nasty little liar," she said sharply. "I advise you to leave Cyril and me alone."

There was a sign of moisture in her eyes and she was white with anger.

"I've no intention of barging in," said Julian, "but don't say I didn't warn you. You're asking for trouble if you get too thick with that fellow."

"Don't rely on me," said Janet very coldly, "when the scandal spreads about you and Audrey Nye."

"Bosh!" said Julian. "Absolute nonsense!"

The brother and sister separated in a state of strained relations, and on his walk to Hartland by way of Guildford Julian thought bitterly of the astonishing way in which he was misunderstood by his family. His father was obviously fretting because he lay about the garden thinking furi-

ously, and imagined that that was just slackness. His mother resented his disappearances after dinner and accused him of being "glum." Now Janet, looking as innocent as a baby, and pretty as a Columbine, quarrelled with him because he warned her about going the pace with a man ten years older than herself and an habitué of the night clubs in London. She flared out like a little tiger cat when he gave her the friendliest and most brotherly hint. It was perfectly true that he was all for liberty and had no use at all for parental restrictions, Mother Grundyism, and the suppression of youth, but Janet was rather different from most modern girls, who were able to look after themselves. She had been educated at a convent school, shielded from the knowledge of evil, and had now come out like a bird from a cage, utterly reckless as long as she had a good time, and perfectly ignorant of every damned thing. At least she looked and talked as though she were, but he was beginning to have his doubts about it.

Anyhow, it was really rather beyond the limit—for a girl like Janet, though perfectly all right for himself and a girl like Audrey—that she should motor home at two in the morning after a dance at Murray's quite alone with Cyril Buckland. That was what had happened last night, as he knew because he had come down in his dressing-gown to find his pipe, after finishing "The Forsyte Saga," just as Cyril's headlights had flashed round the bend of the drive and gleamed through the front windows.

Janet had certainly looked extraordinarily charming in her white dancing frock, and her blue eyes were full of fun and laughter. But Julian resented Cyril's air of proprietorship with her, and the slimy way—there was no other word for it—in which he helped her off with her cloak and breathed down her neck. He had been drinking whiskey, too, as Julian could see by his eyes, and he immediately set about getting another from the dining-room cupboard as though the place belonged to him.

"We've had a wonderful time," Janet had said. "Met all the beauty chorus of the Gaiety and half the stars of the London Revues."

"And Janet beat the lot of them," was Cyril's remark. "She had all the homage of the evening. A fresh little daisy in a posy of artificial flowers."

"Flatterer!"

Julian had shown them by his glumness that he didn't approve of either Murray's or Cyril. He had made that pretty obvious, and things had breezed up to something like a quarrel with Cyril Buckland until his father had come down in his dressing gown with a smiling protest against this revelry in the small hours, and in spite of his smile, an anxious look in his eyes and a suspicious glance at Cyril. Cyril, conscious of Julian's hostility and Mr. Perryam's worry, had not tarried for more than two whiskeys, and drove away again pretty quickly to his father's house twenty miles away, at Hindhead.

Julian's father had begun to give out some rather heavy platitudes.

"I wish you young people would keep better hours. God knows I'm tolerant and only want your happiness but I honestly think this sort of thing is all wrong. Your mother and I—"

Janet had rumpled his hair and protested that a moral oration would keep her longer out of bed.

"I'm as sleepy as a little old owl."

So the scene had ended. . . .

Julian's mind went over these incidents with a sense of worry, and then he thought of his own future with its unformed ideals and vague ambitions, as he tramped through the little old villages of Shere and Gomshall with their thatched roofs and clipped hedges, and stood for a moment on the high ground at Newlands Corner to look over the wide panorama which stretched away to the Sussex Downs, with the faint outline of Beachy Head beyond the farthest hills. Not more than twenty-six miles from London, though it seemed a world away. The only signs of neighbourhood with the great city were the two-seater cars and motor-bikes with sidecars which had brought picnic parties to this spot, and the paper they strewed about regardless of its despoiling effect, after eating their sandwiches. A boy and a girl

were lying between a side car and a hedge of May blossom in the full glare of sunshine and publicity,—the boy's head in the girl's lap.

"Why do these people show such lack of form?" thought Julian, with a sense of lofty disapproval which afterwards amused him when he came to think of it. After all, Audrey had suggested a night in the open air and he had only turned down the idea because of its chilliness. That boy and girl from some suburb of London were only doing the same kind of thing in the daylight and with a defiance of public opinion which showed their pluck and commonsense. Probably a clerk with a day off and taking a rare chance of sporting with Amaryllis—a little shop girl—in the shade. Why not? Still they might have gone farther into the thicket!

Walking on through Clandon village he had to study a sign post to find the road leading to Hartland where Audrey's father dispensed religion to old ladies, adoring spinsters, and village tradesmen, according to Audrey's own description.

"Extraordinary profession, that of a clergyman!" thought Julian. Not a bad existence, if one believed a word of one's own teaching, which was rather much to expect, he thought, after a world war which had put Christianity into the cart, to say nothing of the challenge of modern science and general agnosticism. Still he wasn't prepared to dogmatise about religion or faith of any kind. There might be something in it. One of these days he would look into the thing a bit more thoroughly. He had known a fellow at Oxford, young Brandon, who seemed a thoroughly normal person, fond of games and all that, with an excellent sense of humour, who had a complete faith in Roman Catholicism, including its saints and miracles, and went to Mass every blessed morning! He said quite frankly that it helped him, and gave him pluck to face the horrors of life, including Dons and the daughters of Dons. Well, that was worth while! There were times when Julian himself felt the need of a little exterior help and found the riddle of life hopelessly perplexing without some intelligent scheme behind it which presupposed a God. And sometimes alone in his rooms at Ox-

ford, or quite suddenly on sunny days, as once on the road to Woodstock, he had had a sense of spirituality which was rather startling, a feeling of communion with the Divine essence of things, a queer sense of pantheism or mysticism or other worldliness. Probably some Freudian complex or inherited nature worship! Who was that fellow who said if God didn't exist it would be necessary to invent Him? Voltaire? No, hardly! Anyhow it was an amusing idea, and not without truth. Most men did create some kind of a God for themselves, some code of law which was their religion. He supposed he was doing it himself. Good form—liberty—beauty—the reverse of cruelty which he hated—tolerance—happiness. . . .

A good looking fellow in old grey flannels and a blue tennis shirt open at the neck, came swinging into the road from a side lane, and Julian brought him to a halt by a question.

"Am I right for Hartland?"

"As right as rain. Which end of the village do you want? There's a short cut to the railway station."

"I want the vicarage," said Julian.

The young man gave him a sidelong glance and his lips twisted into a smile.

"I'm going that way myself. As a matter of fact I'm the parson's prodigal son."

"Oh," said Julian, "then you're Audrey's brother."

"That's right. Frank Nye, once of the Flying Corps, late of the London Joint City and Midland Bank, and now wondering what in hell to do for a living. Are you Julian Perryam?"

Julian was surprised at this recognition.

"How did you know?"

"I didn't. I just made a shot at it. Audrey's always yapping about you. Holding you up as a sort of paragon. One of Arthur's knights and all that. Besides there was the deuce of a row in the family because you walked to Henley with the lass."

"Do you see any reason why I shouldn't have?" asked Julian.

Frank Nye laughed good humouredly.

"You and Audrey can walk from here to Halifax as far as I'm concerned. I'm not a moralist."

"I am—more or less—" said Julian rather coldly, "but that walk didn't interfere with my sense of morality."

Frank Nye seemed to ponder over this distinction with a puzzled smile.

"No doubt there's a difference," he said presently, "but I fail to see it. Anyhow, I may as well tell you straight away that I've no more moral sense than a tinker's dog. I was in Flanders and Picardy in time of war."

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Julian.

Frank Nye seemed to see a good joke somewhere.

"Well, we had to live in a hurry. Unless one grabbed at life it might elude one's grasp with a nose-dive. Still I don't want to press that too much. We had some little saints with us who flew straight away to Heaven. Perhaps it's my natural depravity, intensified by early suppression in an ecclesiastical atmosphere. I'm the Bad Hat of Hartland."

He announced that title with an air of whimsical importance as though it were a claim to honourable distinction.

"I expect you're pulling my leg a little," said Julian, who rather liked the look of the fellow and the tone of his voice.

"Not in the least," said Frank Nye. "If anything I rather minimise my infamy. I might almost claim that I'm the Lost Sheep of Surrey. From the Wheatsheaf of Hartland to the Black Horse of Grinstead I'm know as Parson Nye's son what's gone to the bad. In any gipsy's caravan from Gomshall to Chichester they will identify me as that young fellow-me-lad who's the boon companion of tinkers and tramps, the tavern haunting friend of young swells at a loose end, and the unfaithful swain of the prettiest barmaids and sauciest shop girls in Guildford, Leatherhead, and the surrounding hamlets. If you happen to ask my clerical father he'll tell you that I'm on the high road to Hell and that only a miracle can save me from eternal damnation."

"Well, now I know," said Julian with his superior smile. "Thanks very much for the information."

"Not at all," said Frank Nye. "Delighted! Is there likely to be a new war soon, do you think?"

"There seems to be a reasonable prospect," answered Julian with irony. "Some of the newspapers seem to be doing their best."

"Good for them!" said Frank Nye. "I'm fed up with peace. Better be dead in a ditch than blighted in a Bank. Don't you agree?"

"I'm not sure," said Julian. "I haven't tried either."

"Take it from me," said Frank Nye, with an air of authority. "Anyhow, here's my father's funk-hole. If they ask after me, tell them I'm going to look for a job."

He saluted in the Air Force style, whistled to a wire-haired terrier which seemed to like him, and walked past the vicarage.

"Miss Audrey's in the 'ammick in the garding," was the information received by Julian from Mrs. Nye's latest victim of intensive domestic training—a young maid in a dirty apron and cap perched sideways on red hair tied into a tight little bun behind. "If you'll wait in the droring-room I'll ask if she wants to see you."

"I'll go into the garden," said Julian. "Don't you bother."

The hammock was slung under a big fir tree at the end of a lawn badly in need of mowing, and one of Audrey's legs dangled over the edge of it with a generous display of silk stocking, which had sprung a "ladder."

"Hullo, Audrey!" said Julian.

She squirmed round and gave a shout of glee, and then tumbled out of the hammock onto the lawn without dignity, dropping a book of verses and waving a glad hand.

"Hullo, Julian! How frightfully decent of you!"

"I've brought back your night things," said Julian, dumping the brown paper parcel onto a garden seat. "They've been a cause of scandalous comment."

She squealed with laughter at the sight of the package which had become slightly disintegrated in transit, so that the string had loosened, and one end of her blue silk pyjamas bulged out of the brown paper.

"You'll never make a grocer's assistant, Julian! What a parcel, and what a fuss there's been about that little tramp of ours!"

"How's the fetlock?" asked Julian.

"Perfectly cured. I did a bit of Coué on it."

"What's that?"

"Auto-suggestion. 'Every day in every way I get better and better.'"

"Oh, Lord, yes! I thought that superstition had died a natural death."

"It's still helpful in time of need," said Audrey, "but it has its limitations. I find that suggestion, even of the most intensive kind, won't teach my baby sisters not to quarrel and tear each other's hair, which they do twice a day at least. Neither will it dispel the general air of impending tragedy which permeates the domestic atmosphere of this poverty-stricken household. The only thoroughly cheerful person is the architect of our inevitable ruin, the self-inoculated victim of social suicide, and the intoxicated possessor of spiritual and ecstatic dementia."

"Meaning what?" asked Julian.

"Meaning my ridiculous and lovable Pa."

"What's the matter with him?" asked Julian, vaguely alarmed.

"An incurable disease," said Audrey. "He's infected with Roman Catholicism."

Julian did not appear as startled as Audrey had hoped. On the contrary he suggested that he could see no reason why Mr. Nye should not become a Roman Catholic, which was a very ancient and historic superstition—in which quite well connected and respectable people appeared to believe—or a Buddhist, or a Christian Scientist, or anything else of the kind, if it gave him any amusement and personal satisfaction.

"I'm all for liberty of opinion. Surely you're against religious intolerance, Audrey?"

"Good heavens, yes!" said Audrey. "I'm for tolerance of every kind. *'Tout savoir c'est tout pardonner,'* and all that. But in this case it's a question of bread and butter and that little bit of jam which is so essential to human happiness. You see, if my father becomes a Roman Catholic he has to give up his living, and if he does that, what about poor little

Audrey, to say nothing of my delicate mother, my two adorable baby sisters—the dirty little wretches!—and my brother Frank, who is out of a job?"

"Yes, that's a bit serious," said Julian thoughtfully. "Very complicating. And by the bye, I met your brother Frank. Rather an amusing kind of bloke. Is he such a Bad Hat as he pretends to be?"

Audrey was not sure whether her brother could be definitely placed as a Bad Hat. Some time ago, for instance, and not very long, he had been one of our "heroic young airmen." They had called him that in *The Surrey Advertiser* when he was mentioned in despatches for bringing down a Hun. His father, who now prayed for his salvation, not without hope of his sudden and blinding conversion, had gone about in war time bucking about this gallant boy for whom nothing in the world was too good. What had made the difference? Frank hadn't changed in the very least. It was only that the world had changed, and the qualities useful for war didn't seem adapted to peace. He loved the open air, the thrill of danger, something to do with his hands, earth and oil and old clothes, and queer people who were lawless except to their own code.

"Frank and I understand each other," said Audrey. "We used to when we were young enough to scratch and bite each other, and his four years difference in age didn't make him a match for my fury of attack, to say nothing of my tongue which had him beat all the time. There's a lot of good stuff in Frank, if England gave him half a chance. It's boredom that's sapping his young soul. I'm getting anxious about him."

"Drink?" asked Julian.

"Worse," said Audrey.

"Girls?"

"Little sluts," said Audrey.

She was thoughtful for a moment, and then laughed rather anxiously.

"He's asking for trouble in that direction. I don't object to his going to dances with local shop girls, though it's a bit awkward when they sing in father's choir and make eyes at

him in church. But it's past the limit when he strolls about the lanes with gipsy girls and is hauled off to Epsom police station for fighting with a gang of toughs who accused him of carrying on with one of their ladies. He had the sense to give another name when he was brought up in court. But some kind friend told father, of course."

Julian whistled.

"I suppose your governor didn't like it much?"

"Well, father's queer—and very simple—" said Audrey. "He actually stood up for Frank on that occasion because he'd defended the girl when they started knocking her about. He thought it was noble and chivalrous, and gave Frank the money to pay the fine. It was mother who took it to heart most. She's a conventionalist."

"Like mine," said Julian. "But I'd like to meet your father. He seems a bit of a type."

"Perfectly priceless," said Audrey. "A heart of gold. Without guile. But a most deplorable nuisance to his eldest daughter. Argument won't prevail with him. He smiles meekly at my wrath. Only mother's tears and pleadings, poor dear, touch the perfect joy of his faith in our Blessed Lady and the English martyrs with whom he walks in spirit along the Pilgrim's Way."

Julian's desire to meet Mr. Nye was gratified later in the day after he had taken Audrey to have tea in a bun shop in Guildford where she consumed a large number of éclairs and shed a few tears out of laughing eyes at the memories of Oxford days which were now beyond recall because of her unfortunate affair with Beatrice Tuck's prominent and preposterous nose.

"I feel stifled at home," she said. "Mother goes about the house like a wet blanket because of father's perverted faith. Her only signs of a still unbroken spirit are her constant rebukes of my unladylike behaviour. As the Scriptures say, she is convinced of my 'abundance of naughtiness.'"

"Why?" asked Julian. "You seem to me a model of propriety, if I may say so."

"You *may* say so," said Audrey, holding his hand across

the table until he released it because a waitress was watching them with a smile. "I like to hear you say so, Julian! But mother doesn't share your good and tolerant opinion. If I show my legs up to the knees in chair or hammock, she's distressed and shocked."

"Good Lord!" said Julian. "At this time in the world's history?"

"If I smoke a cigarette in the drawing-room she looks as though the house were on fire."

Julian admitted that his mother was more advanced than that.

"She smokes all over the place. Thinks it's a sign of social standing and modern ideas."

"Mother is still considerably worried about *you,*" said Audrey, looking frankly at Julian out of her brown eyes, with a glint of amusement.

"About me? What's her trouble as far as I'm concerned? Surely she doesn't go on worrying about that little walk we had?"

"She does go on worrying," said Audrey. "That's the devil of it. I haven't lulled her sinister suspicions."

"Incredible!" said Julian. "Monstrous!"

"You see, she's never set eyes on you. She thinks you may be some licentious fellow with a loose mouth and bloodshot eyes. I think if she looked into your candid eyes and gazed a moment upon your knightlike visage she might be reassured."

"You'd better take me home and show me off," said Julian, smiling with just the faintest blush which Audrey noted as an additional charm showing that his mask of self-assurance was not quite impenetrable.

"Well, if you can bear to toy with cold mutton, I might invite you to supper," she suggested, and waited rather eagerly for his acceptance of the invitation.

For a moment he hesitated. The Nye household did not seem a cheery spot from Audrey's description, and cold mutton was one of his horrors. But Audrey's obvious desire to take him home made him yield, rather grudgingly.

They did not go straight home after leaving the tea-shop.

They sat in the Castle grounds at Guildford, talking Oxford for a time, and then "did" a movie show at the picture palace —rather like a shop boy and girl, thought Julian, especially when Audrey snuggled rather close to him and tucked her hand through his arm. After that they walked home through Clandon, past the Onslow Arms and the new bungalows—jerry-built doll's houses! remarked Audrey—and so to Hartland through an avenue of beeches with dancing leaves gleaming in the evening sunshine.

"A good spot," said Audrey. "A fairy glade, Julian. Like Barrie's enchanted wood in 'Dear Brutus.' I feel a little like Faith Celli, as the artist's daughter, afraid to wake up and find I haven't been born."

Julian suddenly breathed deeply and spoke with a kind of suppressed passion.

"I want London! This prettiness palls on me. I want the roar of traffic, and the lights of the streets, and the good old human tide. I want to meet people, and find out what they're all doing and thinking, and what's in the world for *me,* and what life means in a big way. Oxford was a cloister. Surrey is a pleasure garden for week-end golfers, retired colonels, and people who hide from the real show and pretend it isn't going on."

Audrey was surprised at his sudden brain storm. But it seemed to please her.

"Is that how you feel? You're beginning to wake up, Julian! I like that restless feeling of yours. I was a bit afraid you might be content with tennis and tea parties."

They stood outside her garden gate and she put her hand on his arm.

"You and I will meet in London. Don't pass me in the street with your supercilious smile."

"When are you going?" asked Julian.

"When father clears out from here, and that's in a week or two from now."

"As soon as that? By Jove!"

"By Jove, indeed! It's us for poverty and the London slums. If you're there, Julian, it will help to keep my courage up a little."

XIII

JULIAN seemed to make a good impression with Audrey's parents over the cold mutton, and afterwards. He made an instant impression upon Julia and Celia, who shook hands with him gravely and watched him afterwards with amorous eyes, undisguised.

Mrs. Nye seemed a little startled at first when he was introduced and said, "So you're Mr. Julian Perryam," with a faint flush creeping into her pale, tired-looking face as though ashamed of certain secret and sinister thoughts about him. Perhaps Audrey had been right about the honesty of his look.

Mr. Nye carved the cold mutton as though it were the choicest dish, and pressed him to take some more from the knuckle end, which he thought was always the most attractive part of the joint. He also praised the water of Hartland and district, which seemed to him to have a delicious sparkle in it. For Julian's benefit, so recently an undergraduate of Oxford, he quoted a number of old tags.

". . . 'A little learning is a dangerous thing,
Drink deep or taste not the Peirian spring."

. . . "*'Ver non semper viret'*—Spring does not always flourish, Mr. Perryam. . . . *'Omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis'* . . . It seems a thousand years since I was number seven in the Oxford crew. Oxford has changed since then too. I don't think you men of to-day take things quite so seriously as we did. We used to be wildly interested in politics. What debates at the Union during the Home Rule struggle! What heated controversies about Gladstone and Harcourt and Parnell and Joe Chamberlain! What tremendous talks at night about religion, art, the civilising influence of the British Empire. Storms used to rage round Kip-

ling's works—and what endless arguments about Free Trade and Tariff Reform! Now, from what Audrey tells me, you're more interested in jazz and cinematograph shows—the pathetic absurdities of Charlie Chaplin and the simpering prettiness of Mary Pickford. Correct me if I'm wrong."

Julian did not trouble to correct him very warmly, and responded to Audrey's wink with the faintest smile.

"There are still some earnest souls at Oxford," he ventured. "They do a considerable amount of yapping. Still I admit that the majority doesn't take life very seriously. Is it worth while, do you think?"

Audrey was vastly amused at that bland enquiry, especially as it excited her father.

"My dear lad," he said, laying down his knife and fork with an air of consternation on his handsome young-looking face, with a kind of inner light shining from his blue eyes. "A question like that makes me despair of modern youth! It's the kind of thing my son Frank says. It's what all you young men seem to be saying. It's utterly necessary to take life seriously, if there's to be any progress at all in this war-stricken and un-Christian world. If you don't take it seriously, above all if youth doesn't get rid of this appalling slackness and levity, I see no hope at all for the coming generations. We need a burning faith sweeping through the hearts of men and calling them to God. It's the lack of faith that's destroying us. Faith in divine love, faith in God's purpose with men, faith in our spiritual heritage."

"Now, father," said Audrey, raising her forefinger, "if you get on to religion and try to cram Catholicism down the throat of my guest, I shall upset the water jug or spill the salt into the sugar."

"Yes," said Mrs. Nye, sadly, "I think we had better avoid religious controversy, John. It only leads to bitterness."

It had led to considerable bitterness of late in her own heart, as Julian guessed, and as Audrey had hinted. Hour after hour, day after day, she had pleaded with her husband to remain true to the Church of England, loyal to the thirty-nine articles which to her were absolute in truth. She had

delved into books which had gone musty on the shelves—Paley's 'Evidences'—Fox's 'Book of Martyrs,' Dean Farrar's 'Life of Christ'—in order to present her adorable but fantastic husband with arguments which might keep him in the straight path of Anglican orthodoxy. Audrey had heard her voice at night in their bedroom going over all these old bits of Protestant theology, raising pitiful protests against the iniquities of the Catholic Church, as far as she could remember them from a vague knowledge of ancient history.

"But, Dad! Surely you remember the bad Popes? The abominable things they did! . . .

"But, my dear, my dear! Rome is steeped in iniquity! . . . The Inquisition was cruel beyond words. . . . The Reformation was so very necessary to purify the Church. . . . Are you going to deny the faith of a life-time—all your work in Walworth? . . . It will break my heart if you join the Church of Rome, with all its heresy which I was taught to hate as a girl. I shall feel so lonely if we're separated in religion. And our social position! This dear parish, the organ, all our friends. . . ."

Then Audrey had heard her father's soothing voice, his boyish laughter at old theological falsities, as he called them, his excited proclamation of the truth and joy of the deeper faith he had found. Then her mother's tears. . . .

Julian guessed something of that when in answer to her protest Mr. Nye smiled and kissed his wife's hand.

"I'm not talking dogma, my dearest! Only asking this young man to take life seriously and love God."

"I'm afraid religion is rather out of my line," said Julian modestly. "But I have an open mind about it."

"Same here," said Audrey, light-heartedly. "Let's go and have some coffee while we can afford it."

For a moment or two Julian was left alone with Mr. Nye in his study, a dismal room with a ragged carpet and a rather musty smell from the brown-backed books on the shelves. When he lit a cigarette Mr. Nye asked if he could spare one from his case, and confessed with a laugh that he never smoked now unless he could sponge on a friend.

"A question of economy!"

"Hard luck!" said Julian, startled by this extreme poverty.

"Not for me," said Mr. Nye. "But I'm a little anxious about my wife and children. When I leave the Church of England I shall have to find some kind of work to do. If you happen to hear of anything suitable to a man of my attainments—pretty good at the classics, not ignorant of English literature, something of an archæologist—I shall be obliged if you will let me know."

"I certainly will," said Julian, "but I'm afraid it's going to be difficult."

In his own mind he was convinced that it would be impossible for this middle-aged man to get a job at a time when thousands of ex-officers were out of work, to say nothing of a million men; harder than his own case, with a similar education, but with youth on his side and a secret confidence in his own gifts.

"Difficult," said Mr. Nye, "I admit. But rather a lark, as far as I'm concerned. Beginning life all over again! Facing the world with a few talents and infinite faith in God's goodness. Waiting to be hired in the vineyard, like those who came at a late hour. Rather a game!"

He laughed as joyously as a schoolboy looking forward to the holidays.

"Not a game for Mrs. Nye and Audrey," said Julian rather severely. This man was committing social suicide with too light a heart, he thought. Surely he ought to subordinate his opinions to the duty of providing for his family?

"God will provide," said Mr. Nye, as though answering Julian's thoughts. "It doesn't do to worry too much over the material side of life."

At the end of the evening Audrey came with Julian to the gate and stood there a few moments in the glimmering darkness.

"Funny family, mine," she said, "don't you think?"

"Your father's a wonder," answered Julian. "A mediævalist. I never saw any one like him."

"A dear," she said, "but damnably ridiculous. Plunging us into destitution, and praying to Our Lady to find him a job."

"Lunacy," said Julian. "It oughtn't to be allowed at this time of day. What on earth are you going to do?"

"Learn typing," said Audrey, "and hire myself out as bondswoman to some Jew financier, or something of the kind. The early 'bus to the city, an A.B.C. lunch—'Please copy this, Miss Nye, and look sharp about it'—the fight in the six o'clock tube—oh, Hell!"

"Keep your pecker up!"

"It's frightfully funny," she answered, "if one keeps a sense of humour!"

She laughed at the fun of it, but Julian saw a sudden glisten of moisture in her eyes. He did not wait for her to put her face up this time as in the inn at Henley, but bent down and kissed her.

She put her hands on his shoulders and returned his kiss with an emotion that rather startled him. "See you in London!" she said and then ran back to the porch and went indoors.

XIV

MRS. PERRYAM gave a garden party on Wednesday of the first week in June to celebrate Janet's eighteenth birthday. That at least was the reason given, but Julian had a secret suspicion that it was mainly for the purpose of securing the attendance of Victor Buckland, who had not yet seen this young lady in spite of his son's frequent visits. It was probable that Mr. Perryam also divined this tactical idea, for he became rather irritable at the mention of Buckland's name and hoped "the old ruffian" would have an attack of the gout or be prevented from coming by one of his race meetings.

"It's bad enough to be pestered by him at the office at all times of the day and night—I think he sleeps with the telephone under his pillow!—without having him play the Noble Patriot in one's own garden."

He spoke with unaccustomed bitterness, and was gloomy when his wife expressed her belief in keeping in with the Powers that Be—"especially when they pay for one's bread and butter, old dear."

"The bread of servitude!" said Mr. Perryam. "Besides I hate all this social show at a time like this when half the people in Europe are starving to death."

"Bother Europe!" said Mrs. Perryam cheerfully. "We have to live up to our station in life, and your position has certain responsibilities which I, at least, must fulfil whether I like it or not. For the children's sake."

"We were happier in our earlier married life," said Mr. Perryam. "Happier, and more honest when I was a young reporter on four guineas a week and you had a little maid of all work."

Julian's mother gave an exaggerated shudder at that recollection.

"I shouldn't care to go back to that squalour, old dear! Now do be reasonable, and don't cast a gloom over Janet's birthday party."

"My frock will cheer you up," said Janet. "It's a glory!"

"And a glorious bill to pay for it, I'll be bound," said Mr. Perryam, but he bent down and kissed Janet's pretty, white neck as he passed her at the breakfast table on his way to his study.

"Doing any work to-day?" he asked Julian who strolled down at an unusually early hour in his bedroom slippers and green silk dressing gown.

"Possibly," said Julian in his non-committal way. As a matter of fact he intended to do a bit of writing if he felt inspired.

His father gave a short laugh.

"If I had said that to my news editor in the old days there would have been hell to pay!"

"Thank Heaven, I'm not a journalist," said Julian, helping himself to kidneys on toast.

"No," said Mr. Perryam, "but don't forget that I am, and that my work pays for your leisure."

Julian flushed a little and laughed.

"That's all right! The privilege of the rising generation."

Father and son looked at each other for a moment, smiling, but with a kind of challenge. Julian was aware of his father's impatience with his free life. After all he had agreed to the idea, which was perfectly reasonable, sound, and good. Why should Julian start at the bottom of the ladder as a hack journalist when his father had reached the top? The point was to aspire to higher things altogether—literature instead of journalese, beauty instead of bunk.

Mr. Perryam whistled "The Long, Long Trail," inaccurately but good-humouredly.

"The rising generation," he repeated with cheerful irony. "I'm afraid we're spoiling the lot of you. And that merry mother of yours aids and abets."

He left the room with an air of tolerant resignation to the inevitable facts of life.

"Well, now," said Mrs. Perryam, with undisguised relief

at her husband's exit, "we can get on with this tea-fight. How many invitations have we sent out?"

They had sent out eighty invitations to the local gentry, mostly of Surrey, including several of the old county families and, above all, the Countess of Longhurst.

"Must we have that old terror?" asked Julian. "She'll frighten the birds out of the bushes."

"She's a nice old dear," said his mother, "and frightfully important. Her husband is Lord Lieutenant of the County."

"Well, don't ask me to be civil to her," said Julian. "She's an infernally patronising old woman, and doesn't wash behind the ears. I met her at Oxford. She's Clatworthy's aunt."

He was bored with all the preliminaries of this garden party, which upset the whole household, demoralised the servants, and entirely destroyed his literary inspiration for at least three days.

He sympathised with his grandfather, who complained mildly that "this snob affair" would interfere with his usual nap under the Scotch fir where he liked to sit in a deck chair after lunch, carefully placed so that it was not too much in the glare of the sun, nor yet too much in the shade.

"Your mother, Julian," he said, "is a very dominating woman. She treats me as if I were a bit of household furniture, to be moved out of the way whenever possible. Your father has no authority over her whatever. He never had. In my opinion—and, of course, nobody ever listens to me—the Suffragette movement is responsible for the wreck of English home life. We've never recovered from it. Women's rights! Liberty! Burning pillar-boxes. Breaking windows. Clinging to policemen. That was before your time I daresay. Disgraceful! What respect could children have for their mothers when they came home with their hair down and their clothes torn after a scuffle in Trafalgar Square? Let me give you a piece of advice, Julian, dear boy. Marry a nice girl, not too intellectual—I don't believe in the Higher Education of Women—and treat her gently but firmly. Establish your authority at the outset. That was how I treated

your grandmother, and she liked it, and respected me. Your mother has no respect for your father. She never had. Rumpled his hair when he disagreed with her. Flouted him when he opposed her slightest wish. Now she's spending his hard-earned money in all this society nonsense—this great house—these pampered menials. It will end in tragedy, mark my words. How am I going to get my little nap this afternoon when all those cackling women arrive?"

"Now, grandfather, old dear," cried Mrs. Perryam, appearing in her new garden-party frock, which made her look almost as young as Janet, and in Julian's eyes, far more beautiful—"go and make yourself look nice, in that new grey suit of yours."

The old man winked solemnly at Julian.

"Orders!" he said. "Right about turn, quick march! Modern women!"

But he obeyed, and in due course appeared looking extremely distinguished in his new grey suit with a white top hat which he wore at a rakish angle, like a retired General of the old school. He was observed later by Julian in an open flirtation with the Countess of Longhurst, who agreed with him that England was not the same, and never would be the same again. Morals had gone. The revolutionary spirit was rampant. It was all due, agreed Julian's grandfather and the Countess of Longhurst, to that rascal Lloyd George and his Limehouse language before the war. He had been rather good in time of war. Now he had reverted again and was playing into the hands of the Germans.

The old lady gave Julian two bony fingers and stared at him through her lorgnette. She had a weather-beaten old face as wrinkled as a gipsy's, but very bright, piercing, humorous eyes.

"You know my nephew, Johnny Clatworthy," she said abruptly. "A very impudent young devil, too! Always up to mischief, and getting into debt from what his father tells me. I had eleven nephews killed in the war, thank God. I mean they all did their duty, dear fellows. The English gentry did. But Johnny isn't a patch on any of them. Don't you let him lead you into evil ways, young man."

She tapped him on the shoulder with her lorgnette, and smiled at him.

"You're a nice-looking fellow. It's good to see some of you alive still. Don't get into trouble with the girls. They're mostly hussies nowadays. What are you going to do?"

"In what way?" asked Julian. "With the girls, do you mean?"

"No, I don't—sauce-box! The less you do with them the better, and tell that to Johnny, the young limb! I mean as a profession. The Law—the Church—?"

"I'm going to write a bit," said Julian. "At least I hope to."

"Like your father?"

The old lady was doubtful.

"Well, of course, journalists nowadays are better than they used to be. I used to send 'em to the servants' entrance when they came to interview my husband. Once I set the dogs at a 'reporter,' as he called himself, though he looked like a tramp. Now they've been made Peers of the Realm and baronets and knights. I daresay some of them deserved it. I'd make them archangels if they'd kill all this beastly Bolshevism."

She thanked God that Victor Buckland and Julian's father were making a dead set against revolutionary Labour and supporting France against the Germans.

"I will say *The Week's* a patriotic paper, though rather smutty now and then," she said. "That's why I'm here this afternoon."

She gazed across the lawn at a new arrival.

"Ah, there *is* dear Mr. Buckland! Those powerful articles of his each week give me a good deal of comfort. A strong healthy tone and no nonsense. Only I don't see the need of printing his portrait every time. He's not a beauty."

Victor Buckland arrived in his Rolls-Royce, accompanied by Cyril who winked at Julian and kissed his hand to Lady Longhurst before looking round for Janet.

Mr. Buckland wore his most genial smile and a white rose in his buttonhole. But he was not a beauty, as the Countess of Longhurst had remarked. He was a tall, heavy-shoul-

dered man, prodigiously stout at the lower part of his white waistcoat. His eyes, very restless and watchful, were heavily bagged under their lower lids, and his broad, clean-shaven face was flabby and unhealthily white.

"Hullo, Perryam!" he said to Julian's father, holding out a large hand with an immense diamond on the third finger. "Nice little place you've got here. And quite a gathering! I like to see one of my editors in a happy home life. Excellent!"

Julian noticed his father's face flush, and his lips tighten. This public proclamation by Mr. Buckland, delivered in a loud, throaty, genial voice, was rather too patronising. He took all the credit for this Perryam party and this house and grounds. He paid his editor well! Good wages for good work!

"Good of you to come," said Mr. Perryam rather coldly. "Let me introduce you to my wife and daughter."

"Delighted, Perryam. How do you do, Mrs. Perryam? Your husband and I don't always see eye to eye on matters of policy—he's a bit of a sentimentalist, eh, and no blame to him!—but I know merit when I see it. The finest editor in England, I must say that! And this is Miss Janet? Cyril spots a pretty girl as quickly as I do a good journalist. The young rogue! Well, well, it's a great game. Life! Youth! Progress! Patriotism! Thank God for England!"

These last remarks, or interjections, were delivered in a way that could be heard by the other guests in the garden, or at least by those on the front lawn, gazing with curiosity, and some of them with reverence, at the great newspaper proprietor whose weekly papers upheld the noblest traditions of English life at least in maintaining undying hatred of the Germans, in refusing aid to starving and Bolshevik Russia, in ridiculing the selfish and blatant arrogance of the Americans, in preaching duty, discipline, the love of God, and the necessity of lower wages to the working classes in return for cheaper beer, racing tips, lottery tickets, immense Prizes, full divorce reports, and heaps of sport. A good healthy tone, as the Countess of Longhurst had remarked.

Julian moved away from the neighbourhood of old Buck-

land. He disliked the man not so much for his politics as for his paunch. It offended his fastidious eyes. The man was gross. It would be horrible for Janet to have him for a father-in-law. Also the patronising of his father made him angry. It was an unpleasant thought that his father was this man's hireling, and that the fortunes of the family depended utterly on his good will and favour.

Julian's eyes roved among his mother's guests for any one likely to interest him. To his youthful intolerance and Oxford point of view they seemed to him singularly devoid of attraction. They were mostly middle-aged or elderly people whom he had met, and now vaguely remembered, in his holidays from Winchester and between the Oxford terms. Then they lived for the most part in old-fashioned houses with big gardens surrounded by high walls still guarding their beauty against the outstretching tentacles of London. Now many of them had put their houses up for sale and were living in newly-built villas and bungalows where they "did" with fewer servants or, in the case of some of these elderly ladies, without them. They made no secret of that. He heard them laughing to his mother about their poverty.

"The income tax, my dear! It's bleeding us to death."

"We had to give up our car. We miss it dreadfully—but what's the use of complaining? We're the New Poor now! Soon we shall be reduced to taking in each other's washing, like the French aristocrats after the revolution."

"Oh, it's not as bad as all that!" said his mother breezily. "I notice a good many cars up the drive!"

"There won't be many if Labour gets into power," said a little old lady, with painted cheeks and a high collar like an Elizabethan ruff. "Those Socialists will make mince-meat of us, the wretches."

Julian thought most of these people looked tired and sad beneath their deliberate attempts to be bright and gay. They seemed nerve-worn and anxious. He felt rather irritated with this elderly pessimism, this melancholy outlook on life. As he moved about the gardens, making himself civil, as he called it, he overheard scraps of conversation between his

mother's guests which were all in the nature of lamentations or prophecies of woe.

"Of course, there has been a sad reaction. The war has left us spiritually exhausted, my dear."

"My boy was killed in Flanders, like yours. What's left for us now? Just a weary time of waiting till we join them again."

"Is it going to happen all over again? That is what terrifies me. This affair in the Ruhr—won't it drive Germany into the arms of Russia?"

Julian was bored stiff, as he called it, with all this gloom and apprehension. In spite of the sunshine and the flowers in his mother's garden, and some excellent strawberries and cream, these people—many of them, anyhow—exhaled an atmosphere of querulous dissatisfaction with their conditions of life, or worse still, of resignation to its "tragedy." They were fairly wallowing, he thought, in self-pity, and quaking with fear for the future. They were afraid of every damn thing—afraid of trade unions, labour unrest, the income tax, American competition, France, Germany, Russia, H. G. Wells, the Rising Tide of Colour in the Mohammedan World, Bolshevism, the decline of religion, Dean Inge, and above all, and always, afraid of the younger generation.

He overheard a lady named Mrs. Alloway speaking to his mother. He had played tennis in her garden.

"My dear Mrs. Perryam, what are we to do with the young people? They refuse to submit to any kind of authority. They think of nothing but pleasure—this eternal dancing!—they do the wildest things! You may be lucky! I confess I'm in despair about Kitty and Bob. I lie awake at nights—"

What an amazing bug that was in these elderly people's brains! They were positively terror-stricken about their own sons and daughters. It was a kind of obsession with them. They couldn't leave the subject alone. Julian had no patience with it, being perfectly confident in the admirable nature of his own youth, and in his own superiority of intelligence, morality, courage, and vitality, to these tired,

timid people. He was aware that some of the women gazed at him with a curiously wistful, admiring, almost hungry look. One lady spoke to him without an introduction.

"I'm Mrs. Wainwright. Talk to me a little, won't you?"

"Delighted," said Julian politely. "Can I fetch strawberries and cream?"

"No. Tell me about Oxford. You're just down, aren't you?"

He told her as much as he thought was good for her—a few generalities, a light epigram or two. She listened smiling, and then he noticed a little hint of moisture in her rather beautiful, tired-looking eyes.

"My boy was about your age," she said. "Before—other things!"

"Oh, Lord!" thought Julian. "One of the Mournful Mothers!"

He was not unkind or callous, only intolerant of gloom. But she did not bewail her loneliness to him.

"What's your idea about the future?" she asked. "Are you going to prevent that Thing happening again? It's up to you. The coming Youth."

She spoke with a kind of timid eagerness, devouring him with her smiling eyes.

"I'm afraid the future will have to look after itself," said Julian. "Anyhow, I don't see my way to alter the world—just yet!"

He answered lightly, with a laugh, insisted upon her having some strawberries and cream.

He went to fetch some, but forgot his mission because it was then that he was introduced to Evelyn Iffield.

She belonged undoubtedly to the younger crowd, although four or five years older than Julian, being, as far as he could guess, about twenty-five or six, and with tremendous experience (as he discovered later) having been married twice already—once to a fellow killed on the Somme about five minutes after their wedding at St. Mary Abbot's Kensington, and now to that dull old Major man, Iffield, who had blabbed to his mother about the walk to Henley.

Evelyn attracted his notice instantly by her look of vitality and freshness among the Old People, as Audrey called them. She was laughing at his sister Janet and with Cyril Langdon who seemed to know her well. She had a rather foreign look, he thought. That is to say, she had almost black hair looped over her little white ears, and very large dark eyes full of light and laughter, and a high colour in her cheeks, though without a touch of coarseness or over-ripeness. She was a tall thin thing, with finely cut features and a grace of movement like French girls he had seen at Deauville and Cannes. Not a bit English in her look, though, as she told him afterwards, of good old Somersetshire stock. Possibly a "throw-back," she thought, to British or Roman or Gipsy blood.

"Come over and have tea with me one day," she said to Janet. "My house is worth seeing, it's the real old thing—early Stuart—and my husband is mostly on the golf links so that we needn't behave ourselves too well. I've generally a few amusing boys hanging around—like Cyril here, who condescends to give me a game of tennis now and then."

"I'd love to come," said Janet, laughing

"I don't think much of her tennis," said Cyril, "but she plays Bridge like a card sharper. The money I lose!"

It was then that Julian touched his sister's arm and was introduced to Mrs. Iffield.

She gave him one glance with her big, dark eyes and seemed to like the look of him.

"You're Oxford," she said. "And Balliol I'll bet anything."

"Right," said Julian. "How did you know?"

Mrs. Iffield held his eyes with her smile so that he felt himself blushing.

"Easy. I've seen the type before. Shy but supercilious. Courteous, but, oh, so cold!"

"That's very rough! The Perfect Prig!"

"'The very purfit gentil knight,'" said Evelyn Iffield. "Chaucer, I believe!"

Her laughter was the prettiest thing he had heard for some time, thought Julian.

"Who's going to get me a strawberry ice?" she asked.

Of course, Julian fetched it for her, and they went into a quiet part of the garden, in a little summer house where no guests penetrated, and Julian was no longer bored stiff. Mrs. Iffield was wonderfully entertaining and rather thrilling. Unlike all the other married women he knew she did not condescend to him, but put herself on a level with him, used his own slang, swore little oaths which rather shocked him at first until he thought how pretty they sounded on her lips, and drew him out about his own point of view so that he found himself talking to her easily, intimately, with a self-revelation which afterwards abashed him.

It was the episode with Audrey that made the talk intimate. She said that her husband had told her how he had met Julian at Henley with a pretty kid.

"Yes," said Julian, "I've a grudge against him for that. I threatened to break his bones. Sorry!"

"I shouldn't try," said Mrs. Iffield. "He's quite strong, and dangerous when roused. Otherwise as gentle as a lamb —and, oh, so patient with my naughtiness!"

"Does he generally go about spreading scandal?" asked Julian blandly.

Evelyn Iffield smacked his hand.

"That's rather rude, isn't it?"

But she was not really angry.

"He's a simple soul," she said. "Goes to church on Sunday, and takes me, when I'm not in bed with a novel. Perhaps he thought it well to give your mother a friendly hint."

"Quite uncalled for," said Julian.

Evelyn Iffield seemed to be amused by this criticism of her husband.

"I like candour! But, you see, Ted belongs to an older generation, poor old dear! I alarm him horribly, though he tries to hide his fear. His mother feeds him with suspicion. She's a female Iago, and I have the misfortune to live with her. . . . Tell me about Audrey. Is it love's young dream between you?"

"Good Lord, no!" said Julian.

"No romantic posh?" asked Mrs. Iffield. "I should be

glad to help in lover's meetings or anything useful in the cause of youth."

"Much obliged," said Julian. "But we don't need any accommodation of that kind. We're rather pally, that's all. You're young enough to believe in that possibility, I suppose? One of us, in spite of being married and all that!"

Mrs. Iffield delighted the birds with her laughter.

"The heart of a child! That's little me. One of you all right, Julian! An honorary member of the League of Youth."

"Then you understand," said Julian. "You know the pass-word and all that."

He admitted her to his joyous confraternity of Youth, with its rights, privileges, and point of view. She confessed, however, that she had the wisdom of the serpent as well as the innocence of the dove. She had crammed a lot of experience into her twenty-five years and would be glad to give Julian the benefit of it, if he ever felt uncertain of himself, which was hardly likely, having the self-confidence of Balliol and the arrogance of twenty.

"I'm ready to listen," said Julian, with mock humility. "There are just a few things I'd like to know in greater detail. You are one of them, if you'll allow me to say so."

She allowed him to say so, and revealed some of her past life with a frankness which thrilled him.

She had been born in India, the daughter of General Hepplewhite—"not the furniture man!" Her mother was the beautiful Edith Mansfield, daughter of Lord Binnington. Did that convey anything to Julian? Not a thing! Oh, well, there had been a terrific scandal. *The Week's Record*—his father's paper!—had published columns of it before the war. A divorce case, and one of the best from the newspaper point of view. Of course, her mother was an absolute rotter, but rather a dear all the same, most frightfully pretty. Well, frightfully was hardly the word! Her father had been given the custody of the child.

"I'm the child," said Evelyn Iffield, with her melodious laugh. "Poor little me!"

She was twelve years old then. The General had travelled

about Europe with her, hating to come back to England because of the scandal. Cowardice that! They had lived in hotels and boarding houses in Holland, Belgium, France, Italy, Austria and Switzerland. She spoke French, German, and Italian, and had been made love to in more languages than that since she was sixteen years of age.

"A rotten life for a girl, Julian. Horrible swine some of those Continental loungers watching out for any pretty girl as a new adventure! And my father was one of those simple Victorian Englishmen who reverence the divine innocence of womanhood—innocence at Nice!—and would rather bite his tongue off than give a girl a straight talk about the temptations of life and its beastly dangers. Oh, I escaped all right—mostly by luck and the defensive instinct. Narrow shave, I can tell you! At Biarritz there was a blighter—well, I needn't go into that! . . . Then came the war. The jolly old war! My God! . . . The girls did all right as far as pluck went, and generous giving for England's sake and all the boys'. The lid was off. To hell with Victorian prudery and the need of chaperones. Adventure. Life. Death. Well, you know all about that."

"Before my time, worse luck," said Julian.

She touched his hand.

"Lucky you! Don't regret it. You might have been dead—and life's good."

She married a boy in the Cavalry—Royal Dragoons—after a meeting or two in Boulogne, where she drove an ambulance. They were married on leave, at St. Mary's Abbot's, a jolly wedding photographed in all the papers. Dicky was a dear, with blue eyes and a little crinkle in his hair, and a lisp—she pronounced it "lithp"—and they had laughed and lived as though it were a game of kiss-in-the-ring—babies, both of them. He had actually cried when he went back to his regiment, though it was miles behind the lines. "You won't get killed, Dicky darling," she had told him. "The cavalry's a dud show in this war." He was killed three days afterwards, near Cambrai, when they were put in, dismounted, into a nasty mess.

"Rough luck!" said Julian.

"Oh, I don't know. Dicky was certain to make a mucker of life. He drank too much at twenty-two. Bit of a temper too at those times! But, of course, I cried myself sick. A year later I married Major Iffield."

"Why?" asked Julian.

Evelyn Iffield thought that a very funny question. She laughed quite a good deal before answering it.

"Why did I marry him? A man of forty-three then. Me twenty-one. For safety's sake a little, I suppose. I could feel myself slipping down the slope. Ted seemed so strong, and solid, and respectable. He is strong and solid and respectable and virtuous and good. I have a great reverence for him. I wonder how he can keep it up. I rebuke myself for not being more interested in his golf stories. I suffer his reproaches meekly when I come home at four in the morning after a dance in town, or go driving down to Devonshire or devil knows where without asking his permission. I even suffer my mother-in-law—that female Iago!"

"Unhappy?" asked Julian.

"Restless," said Mrs. Iffield. "Young. Eager for life."

That was her story, except that the General had died and left her this old house in Surrey—early seventeenth century—and enough money to play Bridge, buy frocks, and get a little fun on her own without begging from Ted.

"Come and see me," she said. "Bring Janet, or that girl Audrey, or that handsome, anxious father of yours."

"I'd rather come alone," said Julian. "Other people spoil talk."

She laughed at him with a queer little look in her eyes.

"Egoist! . . . I don't always talk so much. We play Bridge after dinner, and I'm rather good on the piano. In fact I might tell you that I play Chopin like an angel and rag-time like a devil. Any attraction for a young gentleman from Oxford?"

"Lots," said Julian.

They went back to the garden party.

Old Buckland was shaking hands with large numbers of ladies before getting into his Rolls-Royce. He held a large cigar between the plump fingers of his left hand.

"England will pull through!" he was saying in his loud, genial voice. "I'm doing my best to help things on! A strong Army and Navy. No mercy for the Huns. A supreme Air Force. Justice. Duty. Hard work. Down with Bolshevism. Merrie England! Sport! The old Traditions! . . . What a delightful little spot this is! Perryam, congratulations, my boy! All out of *The Week*, eh? Good! Good! Lady Longhurst—a delightful meeting! Charmed!"

He waved his fat cigar to the assembled guests and made a magnificent departure, with beaming good will and his Rolls-Royce. His son Cyril stayed behind, and was a great favourite with the younger women.

XV

IT was an awkward situation regarding Major Iffield, as Julian found when he met the man in the eighteenth century house once belonging to General Hepplewhite, which was now Evelyn's (she asked him to call her that), to which he went rather frequently after that talk at the garden party. For one thing, Major Iffield was Evelyn's husband and although she was obviously bored with him, she seemed to have a curious regard for him—which she called "respect." For the second thing it was impossible to smash a man to pulp or damage his features ever so slightly while accepting his hospitality, smoking his Turkish cigarettes, and drinking his admirable port. At the same time he decided to mention the matter. Audrey was involved as well as himself.

Julian found his opportunity after three sets of tennis with Evelyn—she played amazingly well, as she did most things, so that Balliol had to look to its colours—followed by three cups of tea in the summer-house, alone with her. By a lucky chance her mother-in-law, who was a suspicious-looking old lady with an austere and somewhat hostile manner to Julian, had gone to Bournemouth for a week-end to stay with a niece or something. Evelyn rejoiced in her departure, and revelled in what she called the Escape from Espionage. She hadn't ruffled a hair over the single at tennis, and looked perfectly marvellous, Julian thought, in a little white frock with a rosebud pattern which revealed her neck and arms. Their conversation was mainly on the advantage or otherwise of early marriage in which she advised him on the whole against a precipitate adventure in matrimony, despite his repeated assurance that the thought had never entered his head and that he considered himself absolutely immune from the microbe called love. It was at that stage of the conversation, interrupted by Evelyn's incredu-

lous laughter and her threat to "learn" him if he wasn't careful, that Major Iffield made his appearance across the tennis court in his usual golfing clothes.

His large, good-natured face had a more florid look than usual, and he wiped his rather bullish neck with a coloured handkerchief of large size.

"Hullo, child-wife," he said to Evelyn, "corrupting the morals of another infant?"

Then he held out his big hand to Julian and said, "Hullo, Perryam. It's kind of you to cheer up my little lady. She hates golf, and I bore her, and she gets lonely."

Julian said "Good afternoon" in a rather cold way which did not seem to be noticed by this beefy major man. Evelyn gave a little squeal of disgust when her husband bent down to kiss her neck.

"Don't you come pawing me until you've cooled down, you old monster. And not even then."

"Well, help me to cool down with a cup of tea," said Iffield good humouredly.

"None in the pot, Old One. But like Patient Griselda I'll go and ask the maids for some hot water."

"I'll go," said Julian.

Major Iffield laughed and held him by the arm.

"Don't bother. I'm not here to be a nuisance."

"Tactless old buffer," said Evelyn. "After all this time he doesn't guess I want to powder my face."

She left them together and the Major offered Julian a cigarette, and asked him how he had got back from Henley with that pretty girl, Audrey Nye.

Julian flushed angrily from the neck button of his tennis shirt to the roots of his fair hair.

"Well, in fact, sir, I wanted to speak to you about that. It was hardly playing the game to spread the tale about the countryside."

"What tale, my lad?"

The Major was blandly surprised and not at all ruffled.

"I mean the fact that you happened to meet me in a pub at Henley with a friend of mine. What's it got to do with the whole damned world?"

"Not in the least, I agree. But what's your trouble, my dear boy?"

Julian resented that "my dear boy" and "my lad." Also he resented the fact that Major Iffield was Evelyn's husband. He was too old, too dull, too gross. No wonder the poor kid was bored to tears sometimes.

"A deuce of a lot of trouble both for me and Audrey Nye. Ridiculous scandalmongering from Surrey to Sussex. Parental alarms of the most annoying and fantastic absurdity."

Major Iffield laughed heartily with a loud guffaw.

"You exaggerate, old man. I can't bring myself in guilty of all that."

"That's hardly true—sir—"

The laughter died out of Major Iffield's eyes and his mouth hardened.

"Look here, youngster, I don't like those words 'hardly true.' Too much like calling me a liar. I advise you to cut them out unless you want your neck broken."

Julian apologised. He had not meant to be discourteous. But he was rather peeved because the Major had said something about Audrey Nye to his mother and that poisonous lady, Miss Raven.

A friendly light came back into Major Iffield's bland Saxon-looking eyes.

"Oh, lord, yes! I do remember meeting that stalwart female, Miss Raven. She was prattling about her visit to Oxford and said she had met you on a walking tour with a girl undergraduate. 'These young people are very unconventional, don't you think?' she asked in her thin-lipped way. 'And I didn't like the look of the girl.' That caught me out. 'A very nice kid,' I said. 'I ran against them both at Henley and she seemed to me charming.' An indiscretion, I admit. Sorry!"

"Then there was my mother," said Julian.

Major Iffield scratched his head with whimsical distress.

"Oh, Lord! Yes—I see you have a grievance against me. It slipped out when she said how much she missed you. . . . Evelyn will tell you I'm apt to put both feet into

things. It's my simplicity of mind. I was born without guile."

"Without brains," thought Julian, but his hostility was softened by the obvious sincerity of the man and by his good humour. It was impossible not to return his laugh when he linked arms with Julian and made apology.

"I've been the innocent cause of scandal, eh? Well that makes me feel damn silly with myself. If there's anything I hate it's village gossip. Poor little Eve suffers from that! . . . Come and have a whiskey. I'll miss that tea."

He insisted upon Julian staying to dinner, and excused himself afterwards because he had to go to a rally of Boy Scouts.

"Evelyn will play you some music," he said, "if you're fond of it. Personally I don't profess to understand anything but 'God Save the King' and my regimental march."

"Both of which you whistle flat," said Evelyn.

"Never mind! I'm a hopeless old duffer, but an adoring husband to a restless little wife."

He took her hand and put it to his lips with a look of adoration which Julian thought was rather absurd in the eyes of this elderly and stout major-man.

"Don't stand on the order of your going," said Evelyn, rather cruelly, "if you will prefer Boy Scouts to my Society!"

"Oh, I say!"

Major Iffield threatened to stay, after such a speech, but Evelyn pushed him out of the room by both shoulders.

"October!" she said when he had gone. "And I'm April! He likes Boy Scouts, and duty, the Empire, and golf, and a snooze after supper while my dear mother-in-law keeps a watchful eye on him. I want life and young love! A nuisance, isn't it?"

She put her head sideways and smiled at Julian in a mischievous way. Then she said, as though in answer to her own thoughts, "But I *will* be good!"

She played some Chopin while Julian sat in a deck chair covered with flowered chintz watching her through the thin haze of his cigarette smoke. She played charmingly, with a professional touch, and looked even better than she played in

the black frock she had put on for dinner, showing her ivory white neck and shoulders and her pretty arms. She wore a diamond star in her hair and her big eyes were very luminous as she played, with only two candles on her rosewood piano and all the rest of the room in the twilight from long casement windows. This room with its panelled walls painted white and its old oak beams across the plastered ceiling was a perfect setting, Julian thought, for this girl at the piano who looked like one of Kneller's portraits of a lady at the Stuart Court. She looked over to him presently and slurred all her notes and laughed.

"I'm boring you stiff! Get out the gramaphone. I'll see how Oxford dances now."

She pushed some of the chairs back and in doing so knocked a little Dresden lady from a Chippendale table and broke it to bits.

"Damn!" she cried. "That's Ted's favourite thing! . . . Well, let's hide the guilty secret and get on with the dance."

She threw the broken porcelain into the wooden coal-scuttle, and shut the lid upon it hurriedly. Then she put a record on the gramaphone and held out her arms to Julian.

They danced together for half an hour or more, only stopping to wind up the gramaphone and start a new tune. Julian prided himself on his ease and dignity as a dancing man, but Evelyn Iffield taught him to dance as never before. She was alive with the rhythm of the music, and her eyes danced, and her spirit. She swayed perhaps a little too much to suit the Oxford style, but Julian was thrilled by her grace and melody of movement, and by the ripples of laughter she gave when she teased him into new steps and took hairbreadth risks with a little marble figure of Mercury on a pedestal near the piano.

"You'll make a dancer," she said. "We'll do a trip to London one day and show ourselves in one of the night clubs. I'll show you how I drive a car—and test your nerve! By moonlight, with a white road ahead. We'll slip away from this old ghost house and the mother-in-law. It's a long time since I had an escapade. What do you say, Julian? Are you game?"

"Rather!" said Julian. "Who wouldn't be with such an offer?"

She put the tips of her fingers down the veins of his hand in a caressing way.

"Nice boy! But, oh, so young and innocent. I'd hate to lead him astray."

Julian blushed because of the suggestion that he was only a sort of kid—a schoolboy.

"That's all right," he said. "I'm old enough to take care of you."

She laughed and looked into his eyes.

"I *will* be good!" she said again, as once before that evening.

Their dance was interrupted by a visitor. It was Cyril Buckland. He seemed surprised and rather startled to see Julian, and Julian expressed his own surprise, and annoyance.

"Hullo, Buckland! I thought you were with my people to-night."

"Yes. I left early. Had a bit of a headache. Don't give me away, old boy. I said I had some work to do. As a matter of fact I was tempted by the lights in Evelyn's windows."

"Well, it's a long time since they lured you!" said Evelyn. "I thought you had deserted me for some other pretty lady! . . . Well, don't look so guilty, but sit down and be bright."

Julian felt the whole evening spoilt by the intrusion of Cyril Buckland and he disliked the easy familiarity with which this fellow took Evelyn's hand and gave it a little pat. He wondered also what Janet would say to it. The pleasure of the evening was further wrecked by two other people who arrived. They were a brother and sister whom the maid announced as Captain and Miss Harker. The man wore a dinner jacket lined with grey silk which Julian thought rather bad form. But he was a good-looking fellow of about thirty, with a clean-shaven, rather horsey-looking face. The girl was a blonde, with tired eyes and a thin face, with little lines about the lips.

"Hullo, Billy!" cried Evelyn.

"Hullo, Eve!" said the man. "We've driven down to see if you're still alive in this mouldy old house."

He kissed her boldly on the right arm above the elbow.

"Now then," said Evelyn. "None of your war-time manners, Billy. I'm a respectable married woman."

"How many times?" asked the man. "I forget."

Julian desired to kick the fellow. That kiss on Evelyn's arm was the damnedest impudence. He was sorry she accepted it so quietly. The fellow had a smiling insolence which Julian disliked extremely, and his sister was not more attractive, he thought. She spoke in a tired, affected voice, and after kissing Evelyn on the lips, asked for a whiskey and soda.

"Billy drove like a maniac from town. I'm chilled to the bone by the wind he raised."

"How's the cave man?" asked Billy.

"Still playing golf and drilling Boy Scouts and doing his duty to God, man, and little me."

"Well, you ought to be grateful," said Billy Harker, "after your war-time life and all its iniquities."

Evelyn pointed an accusing finger at him.

"Anyhow I saved *your* life, my dear. If I hadn't driven like a whirlwind with that ambulance, the doctors at Number 24 stationary hospital wouldn't have found you alive, with that shell splinter in your tummy."

Billy Harker shook his head sadly.

"An unfortunate rescue! Think of all the money you would have saved my unfortunate father if you had driven more slowly! Think of all the girls' hearts that wouldn't have been broken by my excessive beauty!"

"Shut up, Billy!" said his sister. "You know you're jolly grateful to dear old Evelyn!"

"And think of the agony I should have been spared if I'd died ignorant of your treachery to our young love by marrying the cave man. How many times did I propose to you at Étaples?"

"Dozens!" said Evelyn. "And to every nurse in your ward. They all did."

"How many times did you refuse me because I couldn't afford to provide you with the luxury which is the very breath of your beautiful nostrils?"

Evelyn lifted up her white arms with a big, laughing sigh.

"Was it all a thousand years ago, Billy, or only five?"

"Ten million," said Billy Harker. "You and I are the oldest inhabitants of this wicked old planet."

He mouthed and mumbled like a senile and decrepit man, to the great enjoyment of Evelyn Iffield.

The talk drifted into "The War." Cyril Buckland joined in. Even Harker's sister, who had served in a canteen at Amiens. Julian felt out of it, as always when the talk was on that stale old subject by people who had been through it, and once again, as many times before, he regretted his youth which had made him miss the biggest experience of life, by a year or two. Evelyn forgot his presence in the room. She was excited by old memories of the hectic days and nights of war time at the Base in France.

"It was a great adventure! Life is appallingly dull, and all the thrill's gone!"

Some of Billy Harker's stories were rather blue, but Evelyn laughed at them, and Julian felt uncomfortable. He did not like this hark back to the atmosphere of cabarets and dancing halls in France. There was something rather beastly in the idea that Evelyn had been mixed up in it. And this man and his sister and Cyril Buckland had a suggestive way of talk which was rather poisonous, he thought. It was not so much what they said as the kind of sinister undercurrent of their conversation, and little winks and guffaws. Evelyn was too elegant and gracious a thing to be smirched by that sort of stuff. Fortunately she broke the evil spell of it by an abrupt interruption.

"One member of this company is extremely bored! Sorry, Julian. Billy has no respect for you or me or any unsoiled soul. Let's silence him by a game of Bridge."

They played for higher points than Julian quite liked, especially as he and Evelyn lost. His pocket book was thinner when he left the house after the return of the Major who

looked rather startled at the desolate appearance of the room —Evelyn had forgotten to turn back the carpet and put back the chairs—and by this company of card players.

"I didn't know you expected a party," he said rather reproachfully to Evelyn. "You might have told me."

"I'm not good at intelligent anticipation, old dear!" she answered gaily. "These people were uninvited guests, taking pity on my exile. You've met Billy before, so don't pretend you've forgotten him!"

"I must go," said Julian. "It's getting latish."

She gave him her hand, and squeezed his a little, so that he felt a thrill up his arm.

"The League of Youth!" she whispered, "and don't forget that little joy-ride."

Julian walked home in the moonlight, a distance of four miles. All the way he thought of Evelyn Iffield. She was unlike any other girl he had ever known, so full of gaiety and grace, so alarmingly alluring. And he was frightfully sorry for her, mated to that elderly lump of a man, so hopelessly dull, so utterly incapable of giving her the good time she had a right to expect.

October and April—what a mating! . . . Poor kid!

XVI

JULIAN abandoned the idea of writing an epic on England after the Napoleonic War. It was too big a subject for a beginner, he decided, after several strenuous efforts which produced a number of disconnected notes and three rather feeble lyrics. He proposed to turn his attention to a three act play dealing with University life. As far as he knew it had never been done before and it seemed an excellent chance for those gifts of satire and realism which had given him a reputation in the *Isis*. He would have a go at the Dons and reveal them in all their pomposity and narrow minded absurdity as exiles from life, hopelessly cloistered, utterly aloof from modern ideas, and totally ignorant of the undergraduate mind. He would also turn the search-light of truth upon the various types of undergraduate, and especially upon the most poisonous type—the æsthetes with their perfumes, their strange drinks, their cult of decadence. There would be a great ragging scene. . . . It was really a noble idea.

But meanwhile he was subject to the irritations and interruptions of family life, which from the time of Socrates, and indeed before him, thrust their pettiness into the nerve system of genius. His father was seriously disconcerted by the little debts which he had contracted at Oxford, now sent in for immediate settlement by rather impertinent tradesmen. The whole sum amounted to no more than three hundred pounds which in Julian's opinion was reasonable, and almost paltry. Clatworthy and others had marvelled at his moderation. But his father had gone through the bills with an air of pained surprise, as though Julian had been guilty of debauchery and a life of sin. There had been rather hot words between them after the mild preliminaries from his father of "Look here, old

man—" and "I must say, Julian—" The wine bill from Butler's seemed to stick in his throat most of all, though, as Julian explained with outward calm and inward exasperation, it was impossible to accept hospitality without returning it.

"But, my dear fellow, it's outrageous! Fifteen dozen of champagne—why you could swim in it! In our early married days your mother and I didn't pay as much as that in house rent for a whole year."

"Very likely," said Julian. "But you brought me up as a gentleman, and it's quite an expensive hobby—and, on the whole, a foolish mistake."

His father's rather haggard face flushed hotly, and he spoke with unusual harshness.

"Dash it, Julian, mind what you're saying. Do you mean to suggest I wasn't a gentleman?"

"A journalist," said Julian with a supercilious smile. "Hardly one of the high caste in which Janet and I have been brought up—without our asking for it. Super-snobs, with expensive notions."

"You will have to cut those notions down," said his father. "I won't stand for them much longer. These bills border on dishonesty, Julian. I gave you a handsome allowance and believed you were keeping to it. Now you spring these debts on me without as much as a word of excuse."

"No excuse is needed," said Julian. "They were necessary to my position at Balliol. Of course if you use the word 'dishonesty,' no farther explanation is possible, and I'm damned if I'll say a word more."

For the life of him he could not help raising his voice, though he hated "scenes," and that "I'm damned" rang out stridently.

His father became pale and rather dismayed. He put his arm round Julian's shoulder, with an affectionate hug.

"Sorry, old boy, I didn't mean that! And you know I'm not stingy towards you. It's not the money I'm worrying about. Only the principle of the thing. Your carelessness about accounts."

"Oh, hell!" said Julian, and he sloped out of the room.

But this sort of thing was disturbing, all the same. He could not help brooding about it when he ought to have been getting down to his three act play. That word "dishonesty" was intolerable and outrageous. It was utterly unjustified. He had been perfectly straight and not given a thought to these necessary expenses. His father shouldn't have sent him to Oxford if he didn't like the cost of it. Pure waste of money, of course, but if his father liked to buck about "my boy at Balliol," that was his affair. Now he tried to shift the responsibility onto his son's shoulders. Damned unfair. He mentioned the matter to his mother, and to his extreme annoyance she upheld his father's point of view.

"You might have given us a hint about these additional bills," she said, reproachfully. "It was a bit mean piling up debts and saying nothing about it."

He hated that word "mean" as much as his father's accusation of dishonesty.

"It's you that are mean," he said hotly. "What the devil all this fuss is about I can't imagine. The Governor is earning pots of money out of his filthy rag, and now looks as if I'd robbed the till."

"Look here, old lad," said Mrs. Perryam, "not so much of your 'What the devil' to me. I've a bit of a temper of my own when I'm roused, and don't you forget it."

She flashed her eyes at him, and made a comical grimace which made him smile in spite of himself, though he was still very angry.

"I apologise for bad language, mother. But the Governor's attitude of mind would make a saint swear."

"You're ungrateful creatures, you young people of today," said Mrs. Perryam. "We spoil you, that's the trouble. Pander to you, you little wretches!"

Julian raised his blonde eyebrows.

"I fail to see the pandering. It's the unfortunate offspring that have to pander to their parents' prejudices in their querulous old age."

Mrs. Perryam gasped at these last words, and made a rush for Julian to pull his hair.

"Querulous old age! Me! If that isn't the worst insult!" She tugged his hair by the handful, until he cried for mercy.

"I was speaking generally, mother. Oh, Lord! You'll always be young and giddy. As it is Janet and I have to keep a careful eye on you because of all the people who fall in love with you. The number of your victims—Leave go of my hair, for Heaven's sake!"

"I'll make a victim of you one of these days," said Mrs. Perryam, darkly. But she blushed rather deeply, all the same.

It was perfectly true that Julian and Janet were becoming perturbed by the number of their mother's admirers, and especially by the audacity of one of them. That was another cause of interruption along the steep and narrow path of literary inspiration.

It was Janet who had first raised the question, much to Julian's mirth at first, but afterwards leaving uneasy suspicions and troubled thoughts. Janet had desired private converse with him the morning after the garden party, and he had followed her into the library, wondering why she looked so mysterious, with a little secret amusement in her blue doll's eyes. She locked the door and said, "That's all right. Now we can talk."

"I don't want to talk," said Julian. "I want to think, which is not one of your habits, I believe."

She ignored his brotherly insult, and spoke in a whisper as though revealing frightful things.

"Julian, something perfectly appalling is happening in this household. Under our very noses. I think you ought to know."

"Has Grandfather taken to drink, or kissed one of the servant maids?" asked Julian, calmly and unafraid.

"Worse than that," said Janet, trying to look horrified, but giving a little squeal of laughter at the same time. "Mother is having a love affair."

"Good God!" said Julian.

"Unless we're very careful, Julian, you and I are going to be witnesses in a very unpleasant divorce case."

"And that's the little sister from the convent school," said Julian.

Janet pooh-poohed the innocence of convent schools. The girls talked among themselves. Not even a convent could keep out the world. Anyhow she had eyes in her head, and she had seen—very distinctly—that Lord Cornford had kissed her mother's hand in the rose garden. She had also observed the fact that during the past month her mother and Lord Cornford—the dissolute old villain!—had met almost every day on some plausible pretext. He had brought her a novel to read, and came to fetch it away again. He had desired to consult her about the blight on his roses and taken her twice to the Grange for that purpose. They had met at other people's houses, including the Iffields'. That creature, Evelyn Iffield, was probably conniving. An utterly non-moral little beast."

"Rot!" said Julian. "She's charming."

"Yes," said Janet, "I forgot. You're rather gone on her yourself."

"Good Heavens!" said Julian. "These convent kids!"

Janet produced further evidence of an alarming and intimate friendship between Lord Cornford and her mother, culminating in that kissing of hands in the rose garden, when her mother had blushed to the eyes like an amorous schoolgirl and the old man—

"Not so old!" interjected Julian—had behaved with the love-stricken gaze of an elderly Romeo.

"What makes it so dangerous," said Janet, "is mother's susceptibility—you remember that affair with the curate? —and old Cornford's courtly manners and wonderful eyes —like a handsome hawk."

Julian roared with laughter, and then told Janet that she ought to be ashamed of herself. She looked like a German doll and talked like Elinor Glyn.

"Well, all I can say is, 'Watch out,'" said Janet. Then she added with a far-off smile in her deep blue eyes, "Of course there's one thing about it. It makes things easy for us. It gives us a handle if mother plays the Spartan too much when I stay out late with Cyril or others."

"You're a Lucrezia Borgia," said Julian, really shocked. "You're qualifying for a place among the Hundred Worst Women."

Janet received his rebuke calmly.

"I look facts in the face, Julian. Why I'm so anxious about mother is because she belongs to the elder generation. We of the younger crowd know how to take care of ourselves. We have sensible ideas about things. We are realists. But people born in Queen Victoria's reign, or even King Edward's, are hopelessly romantic and go off the deep end at the slightest provocation."

Julian was thoughtful. He was impressed by his sister's unexpected knowledge of life.

"There's something in that," he said. "Do you think I ought to say a word to the mater?"

"Heavens, no! She might fly off the handle, and do the wildest things. Just watch and take care of her. I shall make it my particular responsibility."

Julian laughed again at the absurdity of the whole idea. But secretly he was perturbed. He couldn't help noticing that the very next afternoon Lord Cornford called with a big bunch of Lady Godivas and presented them to his mother with a few gallant words. Janet called him an old man, but he was not so preposterously ancient. Forty-eight, perhaps, not yet completely senile, and still immensely good-looking, like a Norman knight with a hawk nose and very bright, roving hazel eyes and a deeply bronzed skin.

He went out of his way to talk in a friendly fashion to Julian, not observing the somewhat glum and guarded manner in which his advances were met. He told some rather thrilling stories of life on the Indian frontier, and was reminiscent of London in the old days of the Boer War. "Jemmy's" seemed to be the gay haunt then—the old St. James's Restaurant—and he said there was no such fun now as in the gilded halls of the Ritz and Piccadilly.

"The life seems to have gone out of London. We're all so devilish poor nowadays and, of course, as far as I'm concerned, I miss the faces of old pals. They were mostly wiped out in the War. I walk with ghosts in Pall Mall."

He turned to Julian's mother, and said, "This boy of yours was lucky to escape the massacre of the innocents."

Mrs. Perryam touched Julian's hand.

"One of my boys—" she said, and her eyes filled with tears.

Lord Cornford was distressed by his careless words which had re-opened the wound in a mother's heart.

"Forgive me," he said very tenderly, and his own eyes had a little moisture in them. Then he plunged into the subject of the political situation, in order to change the topic, and spoke fiercely of Labour and its Socialistic programme.

"If Labour comes into power—and they seem to have a chance—England will sink to the level of a Boer Republic. The Empire will break to bits as sure as fate. As for people of our class, we shall be skinned alive as far as money goes. Even now we're being taxed out of existence."

He turned to Julian and flashed a question at him.

"What are *you* going to do about it, young man?"

"Me?" said Julian. "I don't think I have much say in the matter."

Lord Cornford tapped him on the knee.

"That's where you're wrong! It's you young men on the threshold of life who are going to decide the destiny of England—and the world—one way or the other. You're the coming leaders. Are you going to crawl before Revolutionary Labour, surrender to pacifists and international Jews, deliver up the liberty of the individual and the rights of private property to a gang of Sidney Webbs, Ramsay Macdonalds, Philip Snowdens and the theorists who prepare the way for the Bolsheviks, or are you going to fight for the old traditions of fair play, justice, and national honour? Upon your answer depends the fate of civilisation."

Julian permitted himself an ironical laugh.

"I didn't know I was such a highly important person," he said carelessly.

Lord Cornford appealed to Mrs. Perryam.

"Don't you think I'm right? Your good-looking son ought to begin to take these things seriously."

Mrs. Perryam smiled at Julian.

"The young men of to-day decline to take things seriously, I'm afraid. Perhaps we expect too much of them, Lord Cornford. You can't put old heads on young shoulders. Give them time!"

Lord Cornford replied with a little shake of the head.

"Time burns, dear lady! England—and Europe—is drifting towards disaster. Capital is being crippled. The old foundations of security are being sapped."

"And trees are being cut down ruthlessly," said Julian, getting a dig in at the destructive work of this impecunious peer who for the sake of ready money was spoiling the beauty of the countryside.

Lord Cornford flushed angrily.

"I have to live somehow," he answered sharply. "Taxes mean axes for those who have a bit of timber."

Mrs. Perryam looked pained by her son's discourtesy, and asked him coldly whether he had not better go and do some work instead of wasting his time in talking on subjects of which he knew nothing. It was a harsher rebuke than he had expected, and Julian flushed at it as though she had hit him across the face. He rose angrily with his hands in his pockets.

"I'll leave you and Lord Cornford to settle civilisation and the scandalous behaviour of the younger generation."

He spoke with bitter sarcasm which afterwards he regretted as going beyond the limits of good form. His mother gave a shrill little laugh as he strode away.

In the library to which he went for a book he found his grandfather standing at the French window looking into the garden. The old man turned as Julian came in, and spoke querulously.

"That fellow Cornford is here again! He's always here now. In my opinion he's getting too fond of your mother. I don't believe in these Platonic friendships with married women. I wouldn't allow it if I were your father."

Julian was astounded and dismayed. So his grandfather

had got the same idea as Janet's in his head. It seemed likely that even the servants were talking! Perhaps he had been an unobservant fool, so wrapped up in his literary ideas that he had failed to notice this alarming situation. And yet the thing was too utterly absurd—too preposterous and scandalous for words. His mother, who had lectured him about Audrey and had old-fashioned ideas of morality in spite of her easy going ways and good-humoured tolerance, and love of laughter and the social whirligig. No! It was an infamous suggestion.

He spoke with real fury to his grandfather.

"How dare you say such a thing! You ought to be turned out of the house—after all the mater's kindness to you!"

The old gentleman wiped his eyeglasses carefully.

"Everybody's against me in this house," he said, with melancholy resignation. "It's quite likely you'll turn me out to die in the workhouse. I expect it. But I see things. There's no discipline, no duty, no morality, in this place. It's a house built upon sand, Julian, and divided against itself. Don't blame me if it falls to pieces. How can a household prosper when it's Godless? When its children revolt against authority and eat the bread of idleness? When its mother runs after Society and neglects the spiritual care of her offspring. In my young days—"

"Your young days," said Julian, "must have been like a Baptist chapel on a frosty morning with Stiggins in the pulpit and a cold in his nose."

He seized his book and left the room with a slam of the door. But in his own room he was unable to read or to think out the plot of his three act play.

XVII

CLATWORTHY came at last with the Metallurgique which he drove up to the house in magnificent style with a hairpin turn outside the front door. He was elaborately polite to Mrs. Perryam and Janet and hilarious at the sight of Julian dozing after lunch in a deck chair with a book on the grass by his side.

"Good old Literature!" he said with enthusiasm. "If everybody didn't know I can't spell I'd have a dash at it myself. Such an active career for a restless fellow like me!"

"How's Oxford?" asked Julian.

Oxford seemed to be much the same, but if anything slightly better or worse, according to one's point of view. Clatworthy narrated the latest rag of the Bullingdon. Very amusing, but rather costly. Young Banstead of the House had borrowed a car from another fellow, taken five men, including Clatworthy, to Maidenhead for a little dinner at the Riviera where they had encountered two little actress girls who were absolute darlings, and after a merry time the party had returned to Oxford at midnight and sent the borrowed car on top gear down the High, without a driver. It had gone quite steadily for twenty yards and then made a swerve and landed bang at the front door of the Mitre. No end of a row! The car in bits all over the road, and the front door of the Mitre—a thousand years old or something—deeply dinted.

"Childish," said Julian. "Not even funny."

Clatworthy agreed that the affair was childish. Even primitive, he thought. But quite funny at the moment.

He was interested to hear that Julian had met his aunt, the Countess of Longhurst, and vastly amused at her comments upon his character.

"An old dragon," he said. "She used to be a bit of a rip

in her time, they tell me. There was one affair with an uncle of young Banstead when he was Home Secretary or something in the Paleolithic age. You can read it in the early Saxon Chronicles, I believe. That's why she's such a fierce old moralist now, and insists on saying morning prayers to all the maidservants, the butler, and the last remaining footmen. Once she flung her footstool at my head because I winked through my fingers in prayer time at the youngest maid—no end of a pretty kid. Still, I will say my aunt is a generous old creature in spite of her little oddities. She always sends me a tenner for my birthday and tells me not to spend it on women or drink."

"And of course you accept the money and reject the advice," said Julian.

Clatworthy lamented that his reputation was far worse than his blameless career justified.

"I'm really a serious little fellow," he said, "masking a simple and earnest soul under the whimsicality of a monkey-like face inherited from noble but dissolute ancestors."

He proceeded to perform his monkey tricks on the front lawn, enormously to the astonishment and delight of one of Mrs. Perryam's maids who flew giggling down the pergola.

"They all love little Tarzan," said Clatworthy. "But meanwhile what are we going to do to pass the remainder of this priceless day? What about a theatre in town with any lovely ladies you happen to be favouring at the moment?"

Julian thought rather deeply. There was no doubt that Evelyn Iffield would welcome the idea with enthusiasm. But he was not quite sure that the Major would be equally enthusiastic, or Evelyn's watchful mother-in-law. Still, the poor girl was pining for a day out from that ghostly old house, and Clatworthy would amuse her a good deal.

Clatworthy made his own suggestion, with more shyness than his previous language of gallantry had suggested as an element of his character.

"Any chance of getting hold of Audrey Nye?" he asked

with an air of casual enquiry, but a sudden flush of colour. "She doesn't live a thousand miles from here, I believe."

"Exactly twelve," said Julian, "and a very bright idea!"

Julian decided to "collect" Audrey first, and then return to Evelyn Iffield's on the way to town. He drove the Metallurgique, glad to feel the little old wheel in his hands again. Clatworthy utterly repudiated the idea that he had been the cause of its disaster, and roared with laughter at Julian's description of the walk to Henley and the subsequent scandal at Hartland and Gorse Hill.

"Funny people, parents," said Julian. "They simply can't understand any comradeship between men and girls without suspecting passionate episodes."

Clatworthy was equally astounded at the preposterousness of this point of view. But he added a little judicial comment.

"Of course, to be utterly frank, old boy, passionate episodes do occasionally arise. One or two have arisen unexpectedly in my own innocent career. But my view is that it depends on the girl—every time. Now you and Audrey, or I and Audrey, could walk through tropical forests without any kind of hecticity. Why? Because she doesn't stand for that kind of thing. She's the modern type, I suppose—frank, healthy, commonsensed, looking at life with larger eyes than our mammas or grandmammas who observed it from the lifted curtains of Victorian boudoirs. They weren't allowed to meet men on equal terms, so that they were alarmed, excited, or over bold when they happened to be alone with a boy."

"Good Heavens!" said Julian, "you're becoming a philosopher!"

"This foolish face of mine," said Clatworthy modestly, "conceals an amazing amount of intellectual profundity. I've lately been looking into the meaning of life. I may be wrong, but it seems to me a strangely ridiculous affair. Take, for instance, that late little war in the world."

"For Heaven's sake don't!" said Julian. "The mere mention of it makes me sick."

"I agree," said Clatworthy, assuming the grave and portentous expression of a Lord of Appeal. "I concur. Often have I vomited in listening to the elder brothers of younger brothers describing their exploits in the trenches. . . . 'Do you remember that morning the jolly old Huns dropped a packet of five-point-nines over the support line and made a mess of the sergeant major?' . . . Such conversation wearies my impatient brain. At the same time, dear old lad, we mustn't forget the damned thing *did* happen!"

"What then?" asked Julian.

"What then, indeed? That's what I've begun to ask myself in secret moments of the night after lobster salad at Fuller's in the High. What then? That is to say, are you and I drifting towards the time when our beautiful young bodies may be made a mess of by five-point-nines in another support line? If so, why? If not, why not? I know a fellow in the Foreign Office—"

"For God's sake!" said Julian. "You're as bad as the Old People at my mother's garden party. Prophets of doom!"

Clatworthy made a face like a mediæval saint in a stained glass window, using his straw hat as a halo.

"Woe unto you, ye children of iniquity!" he said. "Woe unto ye jazzers and saxophonists!"

Then he burst forth into a song about a cat in a carpet bag, and later astonished an errand boy in Guildford High Street by addressing him as Archibald and asking after his mother.

Outside the vicarage in Clandon there was a shock for both of them. Several furniture vans were drawn up, and the weedy path was strewn with bedroom chairs, washstands, and tables. Round the gate some small boys and girls had gathered and Julian observed Miss Raven—the lady who had spread scandal about him—observing from her garden opposite.

"It looks like the flitting," said Julian.

He had already told Clatworthy of Audrey's astonishing father who was giving up his living as a convert to the Catholic Church.

Mr. Nye came down the garden path carrying a velvet backed chair and followed by the two little girls, Julia and Celia, each carrying a footstool, with an air of gravity and boredom. Mr. Nye had discarded his clerical collar and also his coat. He looked boyish, energetic, hot, and happy, and waved a friendly hand to Julian when he caught sight of him at the garden gate.

"Hullo, Perryam! We're breaking up the old home, you see. *Lares et penates!* eh? Well, it's sad in a way, I admit that. We've been happy here, but God is as near us by town as by country—

"'He drives them east, he drives them west, between the dark and light,
He pastures them in city pens, he leads them home at night.
The towering trams, the threaded trains, like shuttles to and fro—'

—Celia, my darling, don't put that footstool where every blessed soul is going to fall over it!"

"I think I'll sit on it," said Celia. "This moving makes me tired!"

She threw her pigtails over her shoulders and sat on the footstool in the centre of the pathway and said, "How do you do?" very politely to Julian.

Julian introduced Clatworthy to Mr. Nye.

"Is Audrey about?" he asked.

"Very much about," said Mr. Nye. "Upstairs, downstairs, and in my lady's chamber. I don't know what I should do without her. Especially as she has to comfort her poor mother who is very much upset about this affair, poor darling!"

"Do you think we might carry off Miss Audrey to do a theatre in town, sir?" asked Clatworthy very politely. "She and I were good friends at Oxford. I'm sure a little binge would do her a bit of good and relieve the situation."

Mr. Nye laughed heartily, thrust his fingers through his chestnut curls, and sat down on one of the chairs in the garden path.

"You could carry *me* off with impunity. And I'd love

to come on a binge with you, young man. But if you take Audrey, I'm undone. We're all undone. She's the moving spirit. Without her we don't move, but sit disconsolate in this wreckage."

"Well, that's very hard luck," said Clatworthy.

Then he waved his hand to a figure in the front hall and said, "Hullo, Audrey! Cheerio! We're the champion furniture lifters come to carry out the grand piano."

Audrey darted out of the house, with an excited cry at the sight of Julian and Clatworthy. She wore a blue overall over her frock, and her left cheek had a black smudge, and she looked hot and harassed.

"You've come at the last act of the tragedy," she said, laughing. "Father is the King's jester making merry in the midst of universal ruin. He positively likes it. Nero fiddling while Rome burns."

"Not I," said Mr. Nye. "But you must admit it has its comic side."

"I don't admit it. The whole thing's an outrage to civilisation, and the grand piano is firmly fixed in the drawing-room door."

She looked ruefully at Julian and Clatworthy.

"There isn't even a cup of tea to offer you. Johnny, make a monkey-face, or I'll burst into tears."

Clatworthy obliged, and added to his performance by scratching himself, so that Audrey laughed in an hysterical way.

"Where are you going to?" asked Julian after this episode.

She gave him an address in Clapham—"a suburb on the south side of London," she explained to Julian whose knowledge of London was limited to Piccadilly and Mayfair.

"It sounds pretty awful," he said. "How do you get to such a place?"

"Facilis descensus Averni," answered Audrey, with the classical erudition of a young lady who had been sent down from Somerville and the tragic gloom of Sarah Bernhardt in one of her death scenes.

"I think I'll go on the movies to escape the awful squalor," she added.

Clatworthy had a better idea than that. He suggested it as a brilliant inspiration as soon as Mr. Nye had retired into the house to fetch another chair, while the furniture men came staggering out and dropping beads of sweat under the grand piano.

"Look here, sweet thing. Why not do a bunk from this domestic chaos and marry little Tarzan? I'm ugly, but very willing. Poor, but, oh, so dishonest!"

He spoke earnestly, with an air of desperate sincerity beneath his absurdity of language.

Audrey blushed furiously and laughed with a little break in her voice.

"Johnny! You ridiculous brat! What would your noble Pa say?—and your terrific Aunts? They wouldn't even give you the usual shilling."

Clatworthy was prepared to risk it. If the worst came to the worst, they could hire a piano organ. Audrey could wind the blooming handle, and he could sit on the top doing the monkey stunt. They would make heaps of money, and play it under the windows of his father's house in Eaton Place until for very shame he opened the front door and invited them to bed and breakfast. What a scheme!

Audrey laughed at it until the tears came into her eyes. But she turned down the scheme with a levity which dejected Clatworthy.

Further melancholy was caused him by Mr. Nye, who had been asked to desist from his furniture moving exploits by the foreman, with the rough suggestion that he was messing up the whole damn business by bringing out the wrong things first and getting in the way of the working men, to say nothing of violating trade Union rules. Forced into compulsory idleness, he took Clatworthy away from Audrey and on the bare boards of the room that had been his study questioned that young man on the subject of his soul. As Clatworthy told Julian afterwards, the ex-clergyman spoke with a sweetness and simplicity of faith

in the love of God and the spiritual chance of youth in a sin-stricken world which caused an Oxford undergraduate to feel the bite of conscience in the centre of his abdomen in a very painful way.

"As a matter of fact, old man," he confessed to Julian afterwards, "when a fellow like me comes up against a Man of Faith with a sublime confidence in divine love, it's extraordinarily embarrassing and disconcerting. Even the Bullingdon Club seems to lose that importance in the scheme of things which otherwise sustains one's moral pride. Audrey's father made poor little Tarzan feel like that fellow in some Bible story which I mugged up for 'Divvers.' 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof.' Amazing bird! Embraces poverty for conscience' sake as happily as I would hug a pretty girl if I weren't afraid she'd clout my ears!"

"Yes," said Julian, "and drag his family to ruin and misery with the utter carelessness of an egotistical lunatic."

The capture of Clatworthy by Mr. Nye left Julian alone with Audrey. They sat together on a garden seat while Julia and Celia marched in and out of the house at the heels of the furniture men carrying their own particular treasures.

Audrey asked him how "literature" was going and smiled when he said "Not over well. Too many domestic interruptions." She protested that family life was a frightful tyranny which destroyed all liberty of ideas and the divine right of self-expression.

"Fathers and mothers are a terrible handicap to their children," she declared, and then wondered why some dispensation of Providence could not do away with the necessity of such relationship.

"Look at my father!" she said. "Simply because he is my father—through no fault of my own—I have to surrender my scheme of life to his ridiculous authority. Where he goes I have to go—even to such a place as Clapham. Because he prefers poverty to comparative comfort I've got to be poor! Could anything be more unreasonable?"

She laughed at the enormous unreason of it, or at some flaw in her own argument, and then was serious and confessed that even with a sense of humour the situation was really tragic. Her poor mother had been crying her eyes out. She was heart-broken at having to leave all her friends, and the little church she had loved so well, and her social position in the neighbourhood. It was real cruelty to her, almost like murder, though Audrey's father did not realise how utterly he was wrecking his wife's happiness. Then there was Frank, her brother. He had had "a colossal row" with his father, and accused him of being a selfish humbug who preached the love of God and forgot his duty to his wife and children. He had threatened to bash Father Rivington as the cause of all the trouble and had actually gone round to the house of that young priest with murderous intent. Fortunately Father Rivington had been able to take care of himself and had behaved so decently that Frank confessed he wasn't such a bad chap after all, and that his father was solely responsible for his own lunacy. Then there had been another row, worse than the first, because Frank had utterly refused to accept a job in a city office which had been offered by one of his father's friends.

"Don't you intend to do any honest work?" his father had asked. "Aren't you going to play the game of life, old lad, and pay back all the money I lavished on your education?"

"Oh, Lord!" said Julian at this stage of Audrey's tale, "that's how my Governor talks! I suppose they all do."

Well, Frank had told his father that he intended to play the game of life in his own way. And now he was playing it in the worst way possible. He had taken a labourer's job in a market garden near Guildford—he had only to touch flowers to make them grow—and was living with a girl in a tiny cottage on the edge of Ranmore Common.

Julian whistled.

"Good Lord. What kind of a girl?"

"No class," said Audrey. "Used to be a servant girl at the Iffields. . . . She'll drag him down to the lowest ditch.

Poor old Franky! One of the heroes of the Great War—and my best pal!"

She was visibly distressed, though she spoke bravely. Presently she asked a question which startled Julian, because it was unlike her usual way of speech.

"Julian, do you think we're on the right line, all of us?"

"How do you mean?" asked Julian.

"I mean we're so jolly sure of ourselves, but after all I'm beginning to have some creeping doubts. It's not really good that a fellow like Frank—Marlborough and all that—should link up with a village girl and end his days as a farm hand. And Clatworthy and you, and all of us—what are we going to *do?* How are we going to shape out? We don't seem to have a notion. That 'literature' of yours—isn't it rather an excuse for doing nothing—marking time?"

She put her hand on his and laughed a little and said, "Let's be honest!"

Julian met her candid brown eyes with slight uneasiness. She seemed to be looking for the truth below his mask.

"We're bound to mark time a bit," he said. "I confess to—uncertainty. I haven't any fixed ideas or principles, beyond a certain decent code, I suppose."

"That's it," said Audrey. "Of course I believe in the open mind, and all that, but—"

"Our crowd's all right," said Julian. "I mean the younger crowd. Only people expect too much from us, and things are against us just now. All this unsettled state of the world—unemployment in England—the break up of the old scheme of things—the clash of old ideas with new ideas. . . . I'm not worrying. I'm a fatalist."

"We're all fatalists," said Audrey. "Perhaps we ought to begin to worry—about ourselves. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise?" asked Julian.

Audrey shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't want to end with my head in a gas oven. I shall feel like that at Clapham."

"Good Lord!" said Julian. "You're getting morbid!"

She put her head against his shoulder, and burst into

tears. Fortunately the furniture men had their backs turned, and Julia and Celia were inside the house.

"Hush!" said Julian. "Cheer up! For goodness' sake—"

He felt immensely embarrassed and tremendously sorry for Audrey, and profoundly glad that Clatworthy did not reappear. He took hold of Audrey's hand to show his comradeship.

At the sound of the foreman's footsteps crunching on the gravel close by, Audrey pulled herself together with a plucky effort and blew her nose as a demonstration of self-possession.

"Little ass!" she said. "I'm beastly sorry, Julian! It's this Frank business that has upset my mental poise! And going into exile where I'll never see you, or any one, again."

"You'll see me all right," said Julian. "I'll come and find you."

"Promise? On your word of honour? May you die if you don't!"

"May I be hanged to the highest tree if I don't."

She squeezed his hand, and then jumped up as Clatworthy reappeared looking so limp and woebegone, that Audrey laughed at him.

"What's father been doing to you, Johnny?"

"Convincing me of sin," said Clatworthy. "Never again will I wink at a maid-servant when my Aunt says morning prayers. Never again will I make a little beast of myself at the Bullingdon."

He took Audrey's hand and spoke solemnly.

"That little proposal of mine? You'll think of it? I'm dead serious."

Audrey blushed again, but would not take him seriously. She also hinted that they were interfering with her domestic duties. Reluctantly they took the hint and went, and she waved to them and kissed her hand as the Metallurgique shot away.

"A nice kid," said Julian over the wheel.

"Adorable," said Clatworthy, "and desperately in love with you, old man. I haven't a look in, curse you!"

"Rot!" said Julian, trying to suppress the colour that crept into his face.

"I saw it in her eyes. I always know. I'm psychic in that way. Well, my little broken heart won't matter. Poor Jack Point—the jolly jester!"

"Don't talk abject bunk," said Julian.

XVIII

EVELYN was delighted with the idea of an evening in town. She suggested a theatre—Galsworthy's "Loyalties" preceded by Barrie's "Shall We Join the Ladies?"—followed by a dance at some really bright place such as Ciro's or Murray's. She undertook to provide a lady for Clatworthy and telephoned then and there to Ethel Harker—the blonde with the tired eyes and the taste for whiskey and soda whom Julian had met a few nights before. That lady accepted with pleasure.

Mrs. Iffield, Evelyn's mother-in-law, was not so delighted with the idea. She reminded Evelyn that her husband had invited General Tester to dinner and would be extremely hurt if Evelyn went up to town. It would look like a deliberate insult to the General. It would also be most unkind to desert Ted.

"It's awkward," said Evelyn, "but Ted will get over it and the General won't miss me if you give him plenty of port this side of apoplexy, and listen patiently to his reminiscences of Tel-el-Kebir. Anyhow I'm going."

Even Julian and Clatworthy were rather doubtful whether she ought to go in view of that General to dinner. They did not want to lead her into a scrape which might result in domestic unpleasantness. They offered to "call it off," regretfully, but Evelyn would not hear of such a thing.

"I'm not going to miss this night out for any old General, Archbishop, or Archangel! I've been mewed up in this old house too long. If I don't escape I shall choke to death."

"But, Evelyn—" said Mrs. Iffield, "I beg of you, my dear—"

"No use, dearest mother! London for me to-night with two nice boys and no old fogeys. My purple frock—I think!"

Mrs. Iffield, mother of the major, tightened her lips. She was a tall, white-haired lady, with aquiline features, totally unlike the broad ruddy face of her soldier son.

"I think we had better talk the matter over alone, my dear," she said to Evelyn, quietly and firmly. "If these gentlemen will excuse us."

Evelyn challenged her mother-in-law with mutinous eyes.

"Waste of breath, mother dear. Wild horses won't hold me back."

"Perhaps we had better postpone it till another evening," said Julian uneasily, with a glance at the elder Mrs. Iffield who gave him a beseeching look.

Evelyn laughed quietly.

"The white feather, little boy? In that case I'll go with your friend, or failing that, alone. London lures me. 'Curfew *shall* not ring to-night!'"

"Oh, well, if you put it like that!" said Julian, feeling crushed. "I'm keen enough, as you know."

"And I'm for liberty," said Clatworthy. *"À bas la Bastille!"*

Evelyn announced that she would be inside her purple frock before they could say "knife." As a matter of fact she was three quarters of an hour, during which time Julian and Clatworthy smoked several cigarettes and exchanged remarks.

Clatworthy's were as usual the more imaginative. He likened Evelyn to the dark lady of the Sonnets. He also implored Julian to give him his password for putting a spell upon the eyes of beauty. Later he hoped that the lady had not been murdered by her wicked mother-in-law. In a serious moment he warned Julian that he was asking for trouble, if Major Iffield had anything like a temper and a strong arm. The little lady was doing something in the nature of a bunk from a domestic dinner table decorated by a General. It was not discreet, though he had every sympathy with those who felt the impulse of a binge.

Julian agreed as to the indiscretion. But as he asked, "What the dickens can I do, old man, if she insists on going? I can't play the part of Wet Blanket. Besides it's

old man Iffield's fault. He shouldn't have married a girl twenty years younger than himself. Obviously she wants a little fun now and then with people of her own age."

"True," said Clatworthy. "True. A pitiful little tragedy. The man is probably a domestic tyrant and brutal fellow. Anyhow he's old and ought to die. But if I may give you a word of advice, Julian, I wouldn't let little Eve get her fun at your expense. It's horribly dangerous—for you, little 'un. Stand from under, old boy! Stand from under!"

"It's a little awkward," said Julian, "but not dangerous. Evelyn is perfectly straight, and the Major is a tolerant old bird. I will say that."

Clatworthy had recourse to Shakespearean blank verse which he recited gravely, with Irvingesque dignity.

> *"'. . . Beware, my lord, of jealousy;*
> *It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock*
> *The meat it feeds on . . .'"*

"Shut up, for God's sake!" said Julian, for at that moment the door opened and Evelyn came in, looking wonderful in the purple frock. She wore a rope of amber beads, and a red rose in her hair. Perhaps she had caught the rhythm of Clatworthy's quotation, for she gave a low curtsey and spoke as near to Elizabethan English as she could improvise.

"Does this simple gown find favour with my lords on a merry night in June?"

"Excellently well, i' faith, fair lady," said Clatworthy, and indeed she was an elegant and graceful thing, there in that old room with its panelled walls painted white under oak beams which had glimmered in the rush lights of Elizabethan England. So Julian thought.

There had been, she said, a little scene upstairs with "the mother-in-law," but adventurous youth had won a victory over suspicious old age. She had brought down a fur cloak and Julian held it for her so that the purple frock was covered. The question of evening clothes for himself and

Clatworthy was raised by Julian. It would waste no end of time to go to their respective houses to dress. On the other hand, they could not go to any smart place like Murray's or Ciro's in lounge suits. Evelyn decided the question. Julian could pick up his clothes at Gorse Hill *en passant* and dress at Clatworthy's house in town while she collected Ethel Harker. She liked her escort to be properly dressed and they owed it to the purple frock.

"What a genius for staff work!" exclaimed Clatworthy. "You ought to be Commander-in-Chief in our next little war!"

It was six o'clock when she sat by Julian in the Metallurgique with Clatworthy in the seat behind but leaning forward so that he could talk to them, with Evelyn at the wheel.

"See me drive to London," she said. "I wasn't in the war for nothing!"

She drove with a cool nerve and took the narrow curves of the winding road at a pace which made Julian shiver once or twice, and according to Clatworthy raised the hair on the head of that simple soul. But her judgment was good and she went through the traffic of Epsom and Wimbledon with just the right margin, though it might be an inch.

That was after Julian had dashed into his house and stuffed his dress things into his kit bag, with a hasty explanation to his mother, which did not seem to satisfy her. She was obviously "peeved" as Julian saw at a glance.

"You and Janet are a nice pair, I must say. Precious little regard for your mother! What's the good of bringing up children who dash away from one at every opportunity?"

"What's your trouble with Janet?" asked Julian, searching for his dress tie.

"She's just sent a wire from town to say 'Back late.' I had no idea the little minx had gone up to London. She sneaked off while I was taking tea at the Grange."

Julian raised his eyebrows.

"Don't you go to the Grange a bit often these days, mater? What's the attraction with that old rotter Cornford?"

Mrs. Perryam blushed quite vividly and faced her son with a laugh that was half angry, half amused.

"He's more interesting than Grandfather and a lonely household, anyhow. And if you were a few years younger I'd box your ears for impudence, Mr. Cheek!"

"Not you!" said Julian. "You know you spoilt me from the time I was a small brat."

"Yes, and this is the reward I get! Two selfish young people who won't stay home a single evening and leave their mother to twiddle her thumbs in her own drawing-room!"

"There's always the governor," said Julian. "Isn't he company enough?"

Mrs. Perryam replied with a laughing groan.

"Poor Daddy! He's getting fretful in his old age. All nerves! And full of worry about your career, and Janet's love of pleasure, and my extravagance, if you please! One gets rather tired of it sometimes."

Her lips trembled a little, and for the first time Julian suspected that his mother had a grudge against life and was not altogether satisfied with its rewards. She had an envious wistful look in her eyes as he folded up his tail-coat, fixed the buttons to his white waistcoat and said, "I must rush!"

"For two pins I'd come with you," said Mrs. Perryam. "Why should I be left out of everything? I'm not so old and ugly as all that!"

"Young and beautiful!" answered Julian. He hesitated and was almost tempted to say, "Come along, mother!" but after all it would rather interfere with Evelyn's scheme of things.

"You and I will have a gay time one night on our own, mother!"

With that promise which she received with a satirical smile, he ran downstairs and down the drive and jumped into the Metallurgique outside the gate where Evelyn sat at the wheel.

"You men take longer to dress than women," said that pretty lady, with a touch of impatience. She made up for lost time on the road to Epsom and London and ignored the cautionary signals of the traffic control men.

XIX

THEY dined at a French restaurant in Soho, where Clatworthy was received with great cordiality and deference by the head waiter and the cloak-room attendant. Clatworthy paid for the meal with a five-pound note which he had borrowed from his father's butler while Julian was dressing in his house in Eaton Place—a gloomy mansion pervaded by a mildewed atmosphere which exuded from its mahogany furniture, its plush-covered chairs, its steel engravings of the Royal Family by Winterhalter, and its portraits in oil of smug-faced old gentlemen in white cravats and a wealth of whisker, ridiculously like the youngest Clatworthy who now jibed at them.

"Is it any wonder I'm a little Bolshevik?" he asked, "when I'm confronted by these ape-like old hypocrites who helped to build up the British Empire, by grinding the noses of their factory hands—we're Cotton, old boy!—and subscribing heavily to the funds of the Church Missionary Society! This house is haunted by the humbug of Early Victorian morality and by the flabby ghosts of all those family butlers of whom Barnett is the last representative on earth."

In the French restaurant Evelyn threw off dull care with her fur cloak and gave little ripples of laughter every time she thought of her escape from a dull dinner with General Tester and her mother-in-law and "poor old Ted." She praised Clatworthy for his nice knowledge of cocktails and chose the most exotic dishes from the menu, including frogs' legs and "tripe à la mode de Caen." She raised her glass of *Moulin-à-vent* to Julian and drank to liberty and the rights of youth. She also held a bright conversation in marvellous French with one of the waiters, and delighted him by her knowledge of his language and his native town which happened to be Avignon. Needless to say she sang

the old song associated for ever with that place of beauty, thus further endearing herself to the waiter.

"Sur le pont
D'Avignon
On y danse . . ."

People at other tables turned round to stare and smile at this pretty girl in the purple frock, so full of vivacity and mirth, so dark-haired and bright-eyed.

Ethel Harker, opposite Clatworthy, who had taken an immediate dislike to her and devoted his attention entirely to Evelyn, was hipped by the public homage to her friend's gaiety, and fretfully annoyed by Evelyn's indifference to "good manners."

"I wish you wouldn't keep laughing so much," she said once. "People will think you've been drinking!"

"I *am* drinking!" said Evelyn. "The wine of Youth!"

She raised her glass again and proposed another toast.

"Here's confusion to all mothers-in-law!"

Julian, in his English way, was somewhat embarrassed by Evelyn's exuberance of spirits in a public place. He blushed a little when he became aware of the interest of other parties in their table. But he was amused and rather thrilled. This was Life! Better than chasing the elusive idea in a garden with clipped hedges and a cuckoo calling. Evelyn was alarmingly attractive, and although she and Clatworthy did most of the prattle—Clatworthy played up to her in grand style and seemed to amuse her vastly—she made Julian feel that he was the one she liked best, and that while Clatworthy was her jester, he was her knight. Twice she touched his foot with hers under the table, as a sign of secret understanding. Once she put her hand through his arm between the courses. It was impossible to believe that she was a married woman with a big house of her own, and servants, and a large-sized husband, and a mother-in-law. She looked so young—she was so young—a slip of a girl—and so childlike, almost.

They went on to the theatre, and Evelyn was so amused with Barrie's piece that she disturbed the gravity of the

stalls by her laughter, and so excited by Galsworthy's "Loyalties" that she could hardly bear the moment when the man shot himself.

Between the acts she discussed the play with Julian rather seriously.

"I've known men like that. The war seemed to snap something in their moral code. Of course it snapped a good many things in the dear old conventions. That's what makes it so difficult to get back again—to the humdrum ways. Sometimes when I think of the old adventure of it all I want to break out, scream the house down, assault my mother-in-law, throw stones at the greenhouse—any old thing, to break the monotony with a big bang. I'd welcome an air raid with a song and dance."

"Rather unhealthy—that point of view, isn't it?" asked Julian. "Though, of course, I understand it."

"No, you don't, little one!" said Evelyn. "No one can understand who wasn't through the Big Show. Lucky for those who do not know. Unhealthy? Yes, I suppose so. That's what's the matter with the world. The headache after strong drink. Boredom after melodrama. If one could only kill boredom!"

She killed it all right later in the evening. Clatworthy "wangled" his way into the Jazz Club which he declared was the only bright place in London after theatre time. It was certainly bright, and might indeed have been called lurid by any one who, like Julian, had a sensitive eye. The dancing rooms, in a basement below the Charing Cross Road, were decorated in the most advanced style of art, one degree beyond the Futurists, with a wild discord of clashing colour-tones in erratic curves and tangential lines. The ceilings were not flat but made up of sharp angles painted in flaming yellows and shrieking greens. It was all amazingly eccentric, deliberately designed to shock the senses, but Julian thought it ridiculous. The company was more interesting. There was a considerable gathering of men older than Clatworthy and Julian—obvious survivors of the Unmentionable Thing—and quite a number of bald-headed and white-headed old gentlemen who made most

noise, seemed most vivacious, and were in the company of some of the youngest and prettiest girls. All the girls seemed to know each other. They called each other "Mabel" and "Lilian," "darling" and "old dear," waved their cigarettes to each other from distant tables, and eyed each other's frocks with friendly or satirical eyes. They were pretty girls, mostly; some of them with fresh childish faces, pouting lips and big babyish eyes; some of them tired-looking, with little lines about their eyes and lips when they smiled, but youngish, and strenuously gay. They all seemed to be drinking champagne, and smoking those gold-tipped cigarettes which they waved to each other. The younger men treated them with affected gallantry, and the old men behaved with an amorous senility which Clatworthy thought highly amusing, and Julian rather disgusting.

"This," said Clatworthy, "is what the picture papers call a haunt of flaming vice. In reality it's merely make-believe. Those old bald-heads have escaped from respectable suburban homes for what they call a night in Bohemia. They'll catch the last train home all right. Those pretty girls are not as naughty as they look. Some of them are keeping shabby-genteel mothers in the Brixton Road out of quite respectable earnings from the Gaiety chorus and the movie manufactures. Only a few depart from the strict laws of virtue, and that, poor children, from necessity rather than choice. Anyhow, here's dear old human nature. Let's study it with unabashed eyes. . . . Hullo, Gertie!"

He waved a friendly hand to a distant young lady with black eyes shining from a dead white face with carmine lips who grimaced back at him and giggled.

"For a simple undergraduate not yet down from Oxford," said Evelyn, "Mr. Clatworthy seems to have considerable knowledge of life!"

Clatworthy had a perfect explanation.

"My terrifying Aunt has warned me so constantly against the temptations of youth that in self-defence I've had to test my moral strength. I find that I can pass through

forests full of lovely witches without turning a hair. My face is like defensive armour. Now Julian, with his knight-errant look, will have to take care of himself. These little houris would draw a bee line for him if he lifted an eyebrow at them."

"Not while I stand by him," said Evelyn.

"Personally," said Ethel Harker, "I find this sort of place extremely boring. For goodness' sake let's get something to eat and drink."

Julian ordered two bottles of champagne, as well as supper at the little table they had chosen as far away as possible from the jazz band and its wailing saxophone played by a sad looking man with black hair who was, according to Clatworthy, a Russian prince.

Every now and then some of the men—especially the "old bald-heads" as Clatworthy called them—left their tables with the girls and danced on the empty floor space.

"Shall we?" asked Julian, and Evelyn smiled and nodded, and they too took the floor, and Evelyn danced as she had that evening in her own house, and Julian and she made such a good looking couple that many people in the room turned to watch them.

"Who's that fair boy?" asked a girl near Clatworthy's table. "He's new here."

"One of the baby boy's from Oxford, I should say," was the answer from another girl who was using a lip stick while she gazed into a little mirror at the back of her powder puff.

"He's got a wicked little devil with him," said the first girl. "She'll teach him all right."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes, it's Evelyn Hepplewhite. She used to come here with a kid officer in the jolly old days. He got killed, like the others, and she married a general or something."

"Well, I'm sorry for the general! He'll have his picture in the papers one of these days."

Clatworthy, discussing the weather with Ethel Harker, heard this conversation with his left ear. It amused him considerably and he decided to repeat it to Julian later in the evening.

Julian and Evelyn exchanged a few words as they danced.

"Queer place this!" said Julian. "Rather sinister, I should say. Do you mind the company?"

"It's the usual crowd in these places. Wicked old men. Young men old before their time. Girls like I might have been if I hadn't married Ted. Do they shock you, baby boy?"

"Not in the least," said Julian, not altogether truthfully, for he was a little shocked by two girls who were sitting on the knees of their elderly admirers. "But I wish you wouldn't compare yourself with girls like these. They may be all that's good, but they're not—ladies."

Evelyn Iffield smiled into his eyes.

"It does make a difference, doesn't it?"

When he took her back to her seat a man with one sleeve empty and a bronzed, soldierly-looking face came up with an air of surprise and pleasure.

"By Jove! Eve! You here again, after goodness knows how long!"

"Thousands of years," said Evelyn, "when Dick and I were babies, and you came back with him on leave. How goes it, old dear?"

"All the better for seeing you. Can you spare me a seat at your table?"

"Ra-ther!"

Evelyn introduced her friend as Victor Bellamy—"otherwise known as Binks."

He sat next to her, after shaking hands with Julian and Clatworthy with his left hand, and bowing to Ethel Harker.

"Poor old Dick!" he said to Evelyn. "Hard luck, eh?"

Julian remembered with a queer kind of pang that "Dick" was Evelyn's first husband—that boy in the Cavalry. Amazing to think she had been married twice. Incredible—and rather terrible. He was out of it now. These two became absorbed in old recollections, talked of people and places unknown to him, laughed at jests which passed beyond him. He listened moodily, rather angrily, with a hot, jealous feeling because Evelyn ignored him for this middle-aged fellow

with little grey hairs each side of his high, bronzed forehead, who made him feel like a schoolboy. It was too bad of Evelyn to forget him utterly like this and go on talking and laughing as if he didn't exist. It was the war again—Boulogne, Étaples, "Number 24 General," air raids, cabarets, canteens, officers who had been killed, "our crowd," London with the lid off, joy rides. He hated all that talk of a time when he was actually a schoolboy, Captain of the First Eleven at Winchester, when other fellows had been captains of aircraft, infantry, tanks. Evelyn talked of those days as if she were old enough to be his mother, whereas she was five years older in age and much younger in looks—a perfect kid! He wished Clatworthy had not brought them to this place. It was a decadent kind of show, and not too respectable. Those two girls were behaving abominably with those old men, and at another table a girl was obviously "tight" by the way she lolled about, and then knocked a glass of wine over with her elbow and screamed with laughter. He didn't mind for himself—it was a part of life he wanted to see—but it was no place for Evelyn Iffield. He wished she hadn't been there before with that "Dick" of hers. It seemed to reveal a phase of her life which he wanted to forget. She had her back to him now and leaned forward to that fellow Bellamy with her elbow on the table and her little pointed chin in the palms of her hands.

"I'm buried alive," he heard her say. "Sometimes that old ghost house of mine—"

Two professional dancers had taken the floor, and Julian watched them gloomily, although they danced marvellously. He was "fed up" with the whole evening, utterly spoilt by the intrusion of Bellamy. Clatworthy seemed to have thawed to Ethel Harker and was telling her about the Bullingdon while she pretended to look interested and hid her yawns.

The professional dancers were doing acrobatic tricks—decidedly risky in their character, not to say on the verge of indecency. Julian was glad Evelyn did not pay the slightest attention to them, although he wished to goodness she would give him a look in. He would have a quarrel with her about

that. It made him feel humiliated, and hurt, and bad tempered. After all, it was his show, and not Bellamy's.

Suddenly Julian sat up straight in his chair and stared across the room. He could hardly believe his eyes, but there, certainly, was his sister Janet with Cyril Buckland and another couple. They were seated at one of the tables near the band, and Janet, his little baby sister, was drinking some poisonous stuff out of a green liqueur glass and smoking a gold-tipped cigarette, like those other girls round the room. Cyril Buckland held one of her hands, and as Julian looked towards them, bent down and kissed her neck.

Julian rose from his chair and went over to them. He was white with anger, and touched, unconsciously, with fear. His little sister from a convent school! It was perfectly outrageous for her to be in a place like this, with Cyril or any one else. His father and mother would faint with alarm if they had any idea of it.

"Good heavens, Janet," he said, "what on earth are you doing here?"

She seemed surprised to see him, but quite unabashed.

"Hullo, Julian! You here too? Amusing, isn't it? Who's with you?"

Julian turned to Cyril Buckland with an angry glare.

"You ought to be damned well ashamed of yourself," he said in a loud voice, "bringing my sister to a place like this!"

Cyril Buckland was frankly astonished at this point of view.

"What's the matter with the place, old lad? If you don't like it, I shouldn't stay, if I were you. Why not do a movie show?"

He spoke with a slight thickness of utterance, as though his tongue had become a trifle too large for the roof of his mouth. But he was blandly polite and patronising, as though talking to a small boy.

"Besides," said Janet, "if you come here, why shouldn't I?"

"I'm a man," said Julian. "You're a kid," and that state-

ment was received with laughter not only by Janet and Cyril as a good jest, but by the other couple—a monocled young man and a girl with honey-coloured hair and touched-up eyes —who were at their table. Their laughter enraged Julian because it emphasised that youth of his—did he look so absurdly boyish?—which had caused him to be put on one side by Evelyn when she met an older friend. He also felt furious with Janet for the calm way in which she flouted him publicly.

"We can't wrangle here," he said quietly, and with a great effort of self-control which made him feel pale. "There'll be a row about it when we get home."

Janet smiled, with perfect indifference to his threat.

"All right, old boy. Save it up."

Julian put his hands in his pockets, and returned to his own table, where Evelyn was still in animated conversation with the Bellamy person.

"Isn't this getting a bit on the boresome side?" he asked Clatworthy and the company generally.

"Not a bit of it!" said Clatworthy. "I'm just beginning to warm up. What about this dance, Miss Harker?"

Evelyn turned to Julian with an ingratiating little smile.

"Do you mind if I dance this with Binks—for old times' sake?"

"Go ahead!" said Julian politely, but with an inward fire of jealousy and resentment against the man who had put him completely in the shade.

He watched them dancing, and raged because Evelyn looked up into the face of that one-armed man as she had looked up to his, with even more vivacity and more obvious interest, he thought. He also observed Janet as she came round the room in Cyril Buckland's arms, looking like a Columbine with a fresh, childlike innocence and laughing lips. Cyril was certainly a little drunk, he thought. His knees were sagging, and there was a watery look in his rather small dark eyes. Other girls passed with their men, the little actresses and movie girls with their deliberate smiles—false as Hell! thought Julian—and their roving eyes.

Wafts of rankish scent came from them as they danced by. He heard little fragments of their baby talk to hard-mouthed young men and old dotards.

"How naughty of you! . . . Oh, you ridiculous old darling! . . . How perfectly thrilling! . . . And didn't she smack you when you talked like that?"

"This is gay life in London!" thought Julian. "This is what I've wanted to see so long. For this I left Oxford. It all seems very dull, and rather poisonous."

A wave of Puritanical sentiment swept over him because of Janet and Evelyn, and his astounding loneliness. He decided that it would be a good thing if the police closed down such places with their fœtid atmosphere. He would tell his mother about Janet. That child wanted the firm hand of parental restraint or inevitably she would go dancing to the devil. All his convictions on the subject of liberty, equal rights for women, and absence from parental control were submerged by his disgust and boredom. He was no prig, he thought, but there *was* a limit, and anyhow this room was filled with a horrible crowd.

Perhaps Evelyn saw the depth of his gloom when she came back with Bellamy, and was a little conscience-stricken at her neglect.

"Look at this tired young man!" she exclaimed. "A portrait of 'Bored Stiff!' by Sir William Orpen. . . . Well, perhaps you're right, Julian. Let's get back to the Metallurgique and go home. Wow—and won't it be chilly?"

Clatworthy was staying the night in town and had arranged to see Ethel Harker back to her flat in Bury Street, St. James's.

"Well, Eve," said Bellamy, "it's been a treat to see you. Don't forget that little lunch with me when next you come to town. Duke Street, over the tailor's shop."

"Right-o, Binks dear!"

She gave him her left hand in a comradely way.

Julian drove back, and his silence did not disconcert the lady by his side for quite a time. She hummed little songs to herself and once burst into a gay laugh and said, "Binks —and a whole chapter of ancient history!"

It was at the London side of Epsom that she condescended to notice Julian's gloom and taciturnity.

"Tired, hipped, or hungry?"

"Hipped," said Julian. "I'm not fond of being treated like a puppy-dog."

"Now that's unkind. I've been perfectly sweet to you. You're not going to spoil it by being peevish? Didn't the child enjoy himself?"

"It was a hateful place," said Julian. "Perfectly poisonous! And I'm not keen on entertaining uninvited guests."

As a matter of fact, he had spent a good deal of money on the supper and resented the slight addition of Bellamy's brandy and soda.

"Jealous!" said Evelyn. "Did you ever expect it of such a nice-minded boy?"

"I'm sick of being called a boy!" said Julian. "And fed up with being treated like one."

Evelyn was highly amused, and protested that she regarded him not only as a Man with a capital M but as a most wise, virtuous, and beautiful specimen of that species. Furthermore, she preferred him to all other gentlemen of Surrey because of his delicacy of profile and sweetness of disposition. Meanwhile, would he object if she snuggled up to his shoulder and slept awhile?

Whether he objected or not, that was precisely what she did, somewhat to Julian's discomfort at the steering wheel, but very much to the advantage of his temper. The touch of her head against his shoulder had something exquisite in its sensation. It was the first time in his life that he had driven down a moonlit road at night with a beautiful girl asleep by his side. It was an almost incredible thing, but a memory that he would cherish as long as he lived. He must write some verses about it. He might even introduce it into his three-act play. . . .

She awakened with a little start on the other side of Leatherhead and shivered a little.

"Conscience begins to bite," she said. "There'll be a scene with dear old Ted. But well worth it. A priceless evening!

. . . Look how the moonlight through the trees makes lace-work on the roadway. Isn't it enchanting, Julian?"

"Shall I drive right up to the house," asked Julian presently, "or stop outside the gate?"

"The front door for me," she answered. "No sneaking in by back ways. In for a penny, in for a pound."

It was three in the morning, as they knew by the clock of Dorking church. Twenty minutes past three when Julian swung up the drive and stopped outside Evelyn's house.

A light was burning in one of the rooms on the ground floor.

"Poor old Ted!" whispered Evelyn. "As cross as a bear with a sore ear, and bursting with moral platitudes."

Julian helped her out of the car.

She put her face very close to his and he saw in the moonlight that she was smiling in a queer, witch-like way.

"Quick!" she said, and put her arm about his neck and pulled his head down and kissed him on the lips.

"Boy!" she whispered, and with a laugh sprang away from him and pulled at a bell so that it clanged in the hall of her old house.

Julian drove away in the car. He was trembling in every limb with a strange, painful, but exquisite excitement, while independently of that sensation of immense physical and spiritual joy, he was conscious, quite clearly and intellectually, of Fear.

XX

JULIAN decided to abandon the three-act play on Oxford life. It did not seem to work out very well. He rather liked some of the dialogue he had written for the first act, but there was no plot in it and he could not get one into it. It was probably a trick he had not yet learnt. It would be better to write a novel, something in the style of Galsworthy, perhaps, or a more refined and subtle Arnold Bennett. Unfortunately he could not concentrate on the idea. It is impossible to concentrate on any impersonal idea when one's mind is obsessed with a private melodrama, and that was the case with Julian, though for some time he refused to admit it to himself and put up a tremendous bluff with his own conscience that nothing had happened to disturb his normal state of mind or to break down that admirable self-control which had given him such a sense of security.

Certain facts, however, forced themselves upon his self-consciousness. One was this inability to work. For hours he sat in his room before a block of manuscript, drawing geometrical patterns with his pencil but not producing a masterpiece, nor so much as a coherent sentence. Generally if he wrote a word at all it was one which abashed him when he awakened from a kind of trance and saw the name of Evelyn written over and over again in his fine, neat, Balliol hand. He was careful to destroy those bits of paper, as though they revealed a guilty secret which he wished to hide from himself as well as from others. Another annoying trick of mentality which plagued him was an absent-mindedness so intense that he did absurd little things which excited the ridicule of his family and made them wonder what had come over him. One morning, for instance, his mother discovered him in his bedroom lying in a chair in his dinner clothes, and he had the humiliation of confessing that he had sat up

half the night "thinking out things" until he had fallen asleep, and had failed to hear the breakfast bell.

"Thinking out what things?" asked his mother, suspiciously.

"Oh, ideas of sorts," Julian had answered vaguely, conscious that his mother's watchful eyes were not quite satisfied with this explanation.

"Ideas for your jolly old book?" she asked again.

"Ideas generally," he answered, and then became impatient and ironical. "Surely you don't want to cross-examine me on the exact nature of my valuable thoughts?"

Perhaps that was what she wanted to do, though she refrained then. But more than once when he sat silent at table, crumbling his bread and forgetting to serve himself with food until old Mary jogged his elbow, his mother looked across at him with a mischievous smile and said, "A penny for your thoughts, Julian!"

"Not worth it," he answered, but for the life of him could not help colouring up as though she had caught him out somehow.

Even his grandfather, who was sometimes very startling in perception of things happening around him, seemed to be suspicious of Julian's silences and self-absorption.

"You're worrying about something," said the old man one morning, as he came upon Julian sitting in a deck chair with his hands in his pockets staring at a water wagtail on the edge of a bird's bath in the little Dutch garden.

"What makes you think that?" asked Julian, coldly.

"I know," said his grandfather. "I've been watching you."

"Yes. I wish to goodness you wouldn't!"

"You've got something on your conscience, laddy."

"Rot!" said Julian, angrily.

The old man sat on a camp stool in front of him and touched him gently on the knee.

"If it's anything you're afraid to tell your father and mother, just say a word to your old grandfather. It's easier for a young man sometimes. He's shy of his father and mother. I was at your age. But a grandfather is so old

that he doesn't seem to matter. Perhaps he understands youth better because he's getting back to his second childhood. Queer idea that, Julian!"

The old gentleman seemed pleased with the idea. He chuckled with mirth at it, but his keen, grey, old eyes searched his grandson's face.

"If you've been getting into debt, I dare say I could help you out a little. I've got a bit of my own that I've been saving up for you. I don't want you to be dragged down by some Jew fellow that's got you in his stranglehold because of some wild folly and extravagance of youth."

Julian was touched by this offer of help from an old man who had always been so stern and narrow in morality, and whose outlook on life was still limited by the ethical standards of a Baptist Chapel.

"It's very kind of you, Granddad," he answered, "but there's nothing the matter. I'm not in the clutches of Jew or Gentile."

"Perhaps it's a woman?" said the old man. "That's worse. I was grievously tempted myself before I married your grandmother. There was a young creature in a hat shop at Tooting. I escaped only by the grace of God, and if that's your trouble, Julian, there's nothing can help you but earnest prayer to be delivered from temptation."

Julian sprang up and kicked over the deck chair.

"Look here, Grandfather, I'm fed up with this prying and peeping into my private affairs. For goodness' sake leave me alone. I'm perfectly able to take care of myself, and in no need of rescue, spiritually, morally, or physically. Thanks very much, all the same!"

"You're impatient with me," said his grandfather, mildly. "Youth is always impatient with old age. I was very impatient with your great-grandfather who wouldn't let me go to the playhouse to see young Mr. Irving. But old people know best very often. You'll find that out one day, when I'm dead. Well, all this is between you and me, Julian. Don't go telling your mother. She only laughs at me and thinks I'm an old fool."

Julian laughed at his grandfather too, but at the back of

his mind was the uneasy admission that by some intuitive knowledge, some brain wave, or second sight, the plaguy old man had found out his secret.

It was a woman that was the cause of his trouble, and by some spell of beauty and laughter and comradeship had taken captive his senses and thoughts. Somehow the whole world seemed different after that night at the dancing club and that moment in the moonlit garden outside her house.

Since then he had been seeing Evelyn Iffield a good deal, and her friendship had made a difference to him—and in him. He was conscious of a greater intensity of self, and of a more vital meaning in things about him. The colours of flowers were more vivid, their scent more penetrating. Fleecy clouds sailing before the wind were invested with a new grace. Darkness was more mysterious, twilight more sad, dawn more wonderful, and in itself a miracle because he watched it for the first time from his bedroom window instead of sleeping on hour after hour after Mary had brought his early cup of tea and pulled his blinds. At moments he felt enormously happy, and for hours at a stretch enormously wretched. He cursed himself as a fool and a cad, and then laughed at himself as a prig and a hypocrite, and thought out a thousand reasons why his friendship with Evelyn Iffield should not be admirable and blameless, while admitting within his own heart that it was a morbid affection which was neither good nor healthy nor within his code and scheme of things. He was afraid to go near her, and yet incapable of staying away. He hated himself for yielding to the spell she put upon him, yet he was ashamed of his cowardice in fearing the consequences. There were times even when she made him feel a kind of anger because of her utter carelessness of his pride, her ridicule of his scruples, the doubts and jealousy she made him suffer. But those moods lasted only for brief moments and she could clear away his sulkiness by a teasing word and make him feel that Youth had no duties, but only rights. On balance, as he reckoned up his own moods with a curious self-analysis, he was more miserable than glad, more restless than sat-

isfied with this friendship which Evelyn Iffield gave him so light-heartedly.

It was the need of secrecy which gave him a sense of guilt. Evelyn impressed that need upon him and was wonderfully artful in arranging secret meeting places and plausible excuses.

"Of course, there's no reason on earth," she said, "why you and I should not be friends and see each other when and where we like. But my mother-in-law has the mind of a Divorce Court Judge—she reads *The Week* too much!—and suspects evil in the most innocent comradeship. Therefore we must be moderate in our friendship and not meet more than twice a week publicly, nor more than once a day privately. That is the tyranny which suspicious Old Age inflicts upon the liberty of young souls! But you know what happened about that dinner party from which I was unavoidably absent!"

There had been, she told him, a very unpleasant scene with her husband and her mother-in-law. It was all the elder Mrs. Iffield's fault. She had made good-natured old Ted assert himself in a way which was quite contrary to his nature and easy-going simplicity of mind. She had goaded him into a belief that this little escapade was a real disloyalty to his affection and reputation. The mother and son had waited up for Evelyn, and poor old Ted, as sleepy as an owl, and cold after the fire had died down, had been really peevish. He had even permitted himself bad language and had accused her of being "damned mean" in cutting off like that and leaving him to entertain the General, who wondered why the devil his hostess had deserted her table. He'd had to tell lies, which he hated, and invent some preposterous excuse about a visit to a sick friend. It had put him completely in the cart. Did she or did she not realise that she was a married woman with social duties, to say nothing of the respect she owed to her husband?

"The most generous and loving husband in the whole world!" the older Mrs. Iffield had added, with thin lips.

"Cutting off with two young asses hardly out of school," Ted had growled, as though that added insult to injury.

Of course Evelyn had had to defend her rights. She had reminded her husband kindly but firmly that because he was getting old and disinclined to go out of an evening he could hardly expect her to be satisfied with a vegetable state of life. If so he was jolly well mistaken. She intended to go to a theatre when she liked and to dance now and then with any nice boy who cared to invite her. She rejoiced in her youth and was not going to develop into frowsy old age before nature demanded its dues. That expression—frowsy old age—had been taken as a deliberate insult to Ted's mother, and poor old Ted who loved his mother this side of idolatry, with some fear, had rebuked Evelyn, rather harshly, for her "serpent's tongue." That had made Evelyn angry—very naturally. She had walked up to bed without another word and locked the door. After that there had been somewhat strained relations between her and Ted, with the elder Mrs. Iffield, playing the female Iago, dropping little poisonous words into his big, simple, asinine ears—"dear old boy!"—and watching Evelyn like a wicked old cat watches a pretty little mouse, ready for the pounce.

"So we've got to be careful, Julian!"

She was cunning in her amusing way, but not careful. Or at least her sense of care was not permanent and she threw it to the winds in impatient moods. Having, for instance, invented ingenious explanations to her mother-in-law why she should go to the dentist three days a week between two and four, she pooh-poohed the possibility of being discovered, or reported by local gossip, walking hand in hand with Julian in a little wood beyond Gorse Hill, or taking tea with him alone in a bun shop at Guildford, or driving about the country with him in the Metallurgique.

Julian warned her of this danger, but she merely shrugged her shoulders and laughed and said, "After all, what does it matter? We're not doing anything wrong!"

"No," said Julian, "but those dentist appointments would make us look in the wrong if some one found out you didn't keep them."

That was exactly what happened. The elder Mrs. Iffield had occasion to go to the dentist herself—perhaps she went

there to confirm her daughter-in-law's story of tooth-stopping, with pearl-like teeth and no sign of toothache. Her enquiries about Evelyn astonished the dentist. He had not had the pleasure of seeing her for some time.

"My dear," said the elder Mrs. Iffield, "I cannot think why you told me such outrageous fibs, and I should like to know what you have been doing on these afternoons."

Evelyn had brazened it out, not at all abashed.

"Well, I did intend to go to the dentist. My teeth are in a lamentable state. But I couldn't face the torture of it, so I went for little walks instead. I must get some exercise, dearest mother!"

"Alone?" asked the elder Mrs. Iffield, quietly.

"With Tiger Tim as my faithful companion and trustworthy chaperon," Evelyn had said, referring to her fox terrier.

Ted's mother had thought it very strange, this sudden passion for lonely walks, especially after that deceitful excuse about the dentist. She mentioned the matter to Ted. That was obvious because of Ted's repeated offers to teach Evelyn golf. If she wanted exercise, and he quite agreed that it was better than moping over French novels, why not take up the best game in the world? Then they could enjoy themselves together.

Evelyn had declined the invitation.

"I should only spoil sport, and make myself ridiculous. Besides, tennis is my game, and now I have Julian to play with."

That introduction of Julian's name was diplomatic. His appearance three days a week to play tennis on her court with another couple now and again—Janet and Cyril once or twice—secured his position as an ordinary visitor, and disarmed suspicion of him as an "extra special" friend. Yet Julian was aware that the elder Mrs. Iffield was not entirely at ease in her mind about him. Sometimes he saw her spectacled eyes upon him doubtfully, and once, he thought, rather pitifully.

Major Iffield himself, in spite of his reference to "young asses" on the night of Evelyn's return from town, was al-

ways cheery and good-natured to Julian when they happened to meet, and went out of his way once or twice to have a talk with him about politics and things in general.

In his simple way he was worried, like Julian's father, about the international situation and unemployment in England, and the stagnation of trade.

"I don't like the look of things," he said. "It seems to me we've rather fallen down after the war, and I'm not sure that the men are getting a square deal, after all they did. I'm a bit of a democrat. I take off my hat to poor old Tommy who did all the fighting and got precious little recognition. I wish you young fellows would get busy and give a lead to the world. Don't let down the fellows who died to save us all."

Julian found himself getting to like Major Iffield, and yet he hated meeting him. He loathed the idea that this elderly man had a husband's rights over Evelyn. It made him hot and sick sometimes. It was abominable that a child like Evelyn—she was nothing more than that—should be tied to this stodgy old buffer who liked to sit over his wine after dinner and fall asleep over the evening paper while his mother sat knitting in the corner, and Evelyn played Chopin and craved for something more exciting. Even when friends turned up—Ethel Harker and her brother, Cyril Buckland, or Bellamy, whom Evelyn called Binks, Major Iffield insisted on going to bed at ten o'clock and gave plain hints to the company that he objected to late hours.

Yet he was conscious of his wife's desire for a brighter life, and made one or two remarks which seemed to Julian rather pathetic and miserable.

"If we weren't so beastly hard up, and if I weren't such a devotee of golf, it would be better to live in town. Evelyn gets rather bored at times, poor kid! But this old house is too big to sell, and I hate London anyhow."

At another time he revealed a secret anxiety, without being aware of his admission.

"What an epidemic of divorce these days, Perryam! The courts can hardly keep pace with them. There seem to be a lot of swine about nowadays, ready to smash up married

life as lightly as they smoke a cigarette. They wouldn't get any mercy from me if they came my way."

He laughed uneasily and seemed to regret his words.

"Evelyn wouldn't give them much chance. She has a quick eye for a rotter."

He smiled at Julian in a friendly way and said he was glad his little wife had pleasant companions.

He was tolerant, good-natured, affectionate to Evelyn, unsuspicious, in spite of the mother-in-law, yet also vaguely uneasy, because of the difference in years between himself and his wife, and her "restlessness."

Julian felt a twinge of conscience, yet argued with himself that there was no reason at all for that. As Evelyn said, there was "nothing wrong" between them. Comradeship was not wrong. An intimate and understanding friendship was not wrong. Even the secrecy of their constant meetings had no evil in it, being due to the necessity of avoiding foolish and unwarrantable scandal such as had befallen him with Audrey Nye. The only thing that distressed him somewhat—most acutely, to be honest—was an occasional danger signal warning him, like a little clear bell in his brain, that this friendship might not last, as far as he was concerned, without one of those passionate episodes which Clatworthy had mentioned. Evelyn was not like Audrey with whom, as Clatworthy had said, a man might walk through tropical forests without "hecticity."

She had little kittenish ways which were rather alarming sometimes. She had a habit of snuggling up to him, as once when they sat together under the beech trees on Box Hill to which they had climbed hand in hand. It was quite deserted there on a Wednesday afternoon, and they seemed alone together in the world—a world of green leaves through which the sun of June filtered with a playful light, where only a jack rabbit scuttled across the glades now and then. Evelyn took off her hat and put her head against his shoulder, as once in the Metallurgique, and played with his hand in her lap, and presently put it to her lips.

"A nice, well-shaped, Adonis hand!" she said, and did not know how this touch of her lips made him tremble all over.

At another time when they sat together in a field beyond Westcott, she lay with her head on his knees, like that boy and girl he had seen at Newlands Corner one day when he had walked over to Audrey's home.

"You can kiss me, if you like," she said, "if you're not too bashful and too cold."

Of course he had liked, and had kissed her closed eyes and smiling lips.

Presently he spoke to her in a strained voice.

"Do you think this is quite good, and safe? Aren't we rather asking for trouble?"

"Trouble? Why? I find it very good."

"Is it playing the game, altogether? I mean with that husband of yours?"

"Oh, bother old Ted! He's all right. What's a kiss, anyhow?"

To him it was tremendous, an experience which thrilled him with ecstasy, when it was Evelyn he kissed, though he had been so cold with Audrey Nye.

Once she accused him of regretting their friendship—funking it, she said. She mocked at him for being a conventionalist, with the inherited inhibitions of his chapel-going grandfather.

"You're an Early Victorian," she said, "afraid of the liberties won by modern youth. I believe you think I'm a wicked temptress luring you to sin. As a matter of fact, dear Julian, I am a very nice little comrade offering you the privilege of a refined and delicate friendship. If you don't want it, say so, and I'll find another 'pal' to save me from hopeless boredom."

Of course he protested against her accusations, and vowed that his character was as far removed from Early Victorianism as any man of the younger crowd.

They quarrelled sometimes because of his "ridiculous jealousy" as she called it. That was when she went up to town several times to lunch with the man Bellamy, otherwise Binks, and still more when he met her coming from lunch in The White Horse at Dorking with Cyril Buckland, of all men.

He was frightfully hurt at that.

"What on earth do you want with that fellow Buckland?" he asked in a rage. "For one thing he's making up to Janet, and secondly he's a thoroughly poisonous person, and thirdly you told me you had a bit of a headache and wanted to stay at home."

"And fourthly, fifthly, and sixthly," said Evelyn calmly, "I am complete mistress of my own movements and if my headache disappears I have a perfect right to lunch with my friend who offers to pay for it. And seventhly, eighthly and ninthly, I can't understand why you get fussed if I give so much as a friendly glance at any one but yourself. You know perfectly well that you and I are extra special friends. But you can't expect me to live like a cloistered nun, to all the world but you."

He did expect that, with the passionate feeling of what he still called "friendship," and he could hardly be civil to Cyril Buckland when they met at Evelyn's house for tennis or bridge. He was enraged at these times because his sulkiness only caused Evelyn to tease him by showing particular favour to this fellow and laughing at Cyril's attempts at humour as though they were the highest form of wit.

There was something like a scene between Cyril and himself after one of those evenings at the Iffields. Evelyn had accepted an invitation from Cyril to lunch at the Ritz on the following Monday with Janet, in spite of a previous engagement with Julian to motor to Henley and do an afternoon on the river. It was a deliberate "let down," as he could see by Evelyn's whimsical and challenging glance at him, and his anger was not soothed by Cyril's casual and condescending way of extending the invitation, as a kind of afterthought.

"By the way, Julian, you might care to come along too, if you're not too busy with that mystic book of yours."

Julian answered freezingly.

"Thanks. I've another engagement."

"Oh, come along, Julian!" said Janet. "We're going to do a matinée, and you can pair off with Evelyn."

"I don't break engagements as lightly as some people," said Julian, coldly.

Evelyn laughed in her teasing way.

"Not if the other party merely alters the place of rendezvous? Isn't that standing too severely upon a point of prejudice?"

"No," said Julian. "It's playing the rules of the game."

Evelyn answered him lightly.

"It's good to alter the rules when it makes a better game."

"That's rather like cheating," said Julian.

It was a rude thing to say, and said rudely. Evelyn only laughed again, but Cyril raised his eyebrows over the card table and spoke to Julian like a schoolmaster chiding a small boy.

"Remember your manners, laddy."

Julian went white to the lips, and felt a passionate anger threatening to shake his self-control. But he mastered himself and answered in a calm, scornful voice:

"I don't take my lessons from you, Buckland, either in manners or morals."

Janet smacked his hand across the table.

"Little children love one another!" she exclaimed.

Evelyn remarked that the atmosphere was rather electric. She hoped there wouldn't be a thunderstorm over the card table, or a storm in the teacups. The elder Mrs. Iffield in a chair by the piano paused in her knitting and stared across at Julian with her watchful eyes, in which again there was a strange look of pity, as though he were being tempted beyond his strength. Major Iffield, who hated bridge, was absorbed in the sporting page of *The Times*.

It was only when Cyril was drinking a whiskey after the drive home with Janet that the breeze developed between the two young men. They were alone together in the library while Janet had gone upstairs to say good night to her mother, who had already gone to bed.

"Referring back," said Cyril, raising his glass, "I didn't quite like that remark about my morals, old man! Any sinister suggestion?"

Julian gave a short laugh.

"Perhaps you can supply your own interpretation."

Cyril put his glass down and looked at Julian in a friendly, candid way.

"I don't pretend to be a saint, young fellow, and I've seen a good bit of life for my age. Perhaps you'll allow me to give you a friendly tip."

"I'm not asking for it," said Julian.

"Well, I'll give it all the same. Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones."

"Meaning what?" asked Julian.

"Meaning if I were you I wouldn't rot up your young career by a love affair with a married woman, especially when she's five years older than yourself, and only amusing herself with a nice boy. It's deuced dangerous, old lad, believe me."

For the second time that evening Julian lost all the colour in his face. He answered harshly, with a sudden break in his voice.

"I don't want any revelations of your dirty mind, Buckland. Mind your own damned business."

For a second Cyril Buckland's face flushed with anger and he swung out his chin and stood facing Julian in a threatening way with a clenched fist.

"By thunder!" he said.

Then he took a deep breath and unclenched his fist and let his hand drop to his side while he gave a queer kind of laugh.

"If you weren't Janet's brother—and so ridiculously young—" he said quietly, "I might be tempted to hit you for those words."

"Forget my youth," said Julian. "I'm not so young as all that. And as for Janet, I should be glad to relieve her of your unpleasant friendship."

Cyril Buckland put his hand on Julian's shoulder with a hard grip.

"I'm not going to quarrel, old lad. If you mean I'm not good enough for Janet, I agree. I'm a bit of a rotter. Always have been. It's in my blood, I guess. But I don't like to see you steering for shipwreck at the beginning of your

voyage—and Evelyn is the most wonderful and dangerous little siren I know. Fearfully dangerous because so enormously attractive! Have a care, that's all I venture to suggest."

Something in Cyril Buckland's way of speech disarmed Julian's anger. Perhaps it was his confession of being a bit of a rotter and not good enough for Janet. He was candid, anyhow, and there was a ring of sincerity in his voice, and a kind of homage to Evelyn's beauty and grace. Perhaps, after all, there was some truth in what he said. There was just a chance of danger in this friendship with Evelyn. If Julian once lost self-control—which, of course, he wouldn't—he might find himself on the rocks.

He shook himself free from Cyril's grip, but without renewed hostility.

"Much obliged to you for your warning," he said with icy sarcasm, "but it's quite needless. Evelyn and I are nothing more than pals. May I suggest that you don't seem to avoid the lady with that care which you recommend to me?"

Cyril Buckland poured himself out another whiskey and paused a moment before replying. His face flushed a little when he answered.

"Evelyn Iffield and I have known each other for some time and understand each other perfectly. I amuse her a good deal. That's all."

Janet came back, and the conversation ended. The two young men said good night to each other in a more friendly way than usual, at least on Julian's side, for this conversation had eased his sense of jealousy and made him sorry for Cyril Buckland. It was quite obvious that he had been in love with Evelyn and that she had turned him down, poor devil.

XXI

JULIAN was aware that there were strained relations between his father and mother, and he suspected for a time that he was the cause of it. His father was undoubtedly getting impatient and irritable because Julian did not produce any work. Only by occasional questions and remarks did he reveal this to Julian himself, for there was that incurable shyness between them which prevented any frank discussion —except in moments of crisis like his return from Oxford— and seemed to put an invisible barrier between them. But Julian overheard various remarks between his parents which suggested that his father was reviving the idea of making a journalist of him and that his mother was defending his continued liberty. There was one conversation particularly which came to his ears by chance and startled him by the intensity of emotion with which his father and mother spoke.

He happened to be reading the paper outside the breakfast room window on a Sunday morning. It was Victor Buckland's paper, *The Week,* edited by his father, and he was scanning the pages with contemptuous eyes for its vulgar headlines, its columns of divorce news, its smudgy pictures of bathing girls and dancing girls and its "powerful article" by Victor Buckland (portrait inset) in "Let America Mind Its Own Business!" "One million circulation," read Julian with the contempt of Balliol for the low scale of popular intelligence and the shame of a son for his father's disgraceful means of livelihood.

It was then that he heard his father speak loudly and harshly.

"The boy is just lounging. It's utterly demoralising."

"He's all right," said Mrs. Perryam. "Trying to find himself. Besides he's too young for the slavery of Fleet Street."

"But I'm not too old! You never think of that."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Perryam, lightly, "youth will be served. Now you've made a success, John, we can afford to give the children a good time."

"That's all they think of," answered Julian's father. "A good time! They never think how much it costs their father in drudgery, in anxiety, in distasteful work. I never get their companionship even. When I come home they go out. When I'm asleep they come in. What's my reward for years of hard work and devotion?"

"Success!" said Mrs. Perryam. "This jolly little house. A happy family. What more do you want, old dear?"

"Lots more," said Mr. Perryam. "I want affection, and I don't get it. Not even from my wife."

"Don't talk nonsense, John. *I* haven't changed."

There was a moment's silence, and then Julian's father spoke again, bitterly.

"You *have* changed. You think of nothing but society now, and new frocks, and titled friends. There's that man Cornford—"

"What about him?" asked Mrs. Perryam, sharply.

"He's always hanging round you. I don't like it. You seem to forget you're a married woman, with a grown-up family!"

Julian rose from his seat outside the breakfast room window. He had not meant to listen to that conversation, and for a few moments had only listened idly, but now at those last words his face had flushed and he walked away down the garden path. Perhaps the sound of his steps startled his father and mother, for they were silent after his going.

The words he had overheard reminded him of Janet's ridiculous conversation one morning, and of other words—outrageous words—spoken by his grandfather. His mother had undoubtedly taken to the habit of going about with Lord Cornford in a curiously familiar way as though he belonged to the family. He had seen them together in the High Street when she went shopping and the handsome old peer held her parcels and helped her into his Daimler which he seemed to place at her service. She seemed to find

amusement in these little gallantries, and Julian sympathised with her and felt a hot wave of indignation surge up to his brain because of his father's absurd remarks.

Why, in Heaven's name, could there not be friendship between men and women, old and young, without suspicion, scandal, green-eyed jealousy? It was an infamous heritage of cave-man days, and old traditions of cruelty and hate creeping out of the lairs of primitive memory to make unhappiness in modern lives. Fortunately Youth had decided to do away with all such rubbish. They had revolted against it, thrust it into the scrap-heap of old abominations.

Julian, after his wave of indignation, felt secretly amused that his mother should be in the same position as himself. She would understand his friendship with Evelyn, trust his honour, and rely on his perfect self-control. She would be useful as an ally in the ethics of comradeship. So he persuaded himself, ignoring a sense of uneasiness which tried to spoil his peace of mind.

But it was the very next night that his pride received a knockout blow and that he became aware of a weakness that could not be justified in that code of honour which was his substitute for religious law.

Evelyn, Janet, and Cyril had gone up to town together for the lunch at the Ritz and a matinée at the Palace. On a point of pride he had not accompanied them, and passed a miserable day in his room, with only brief appearances for meals when he was irritable with his grandfather because the old man insisted upon narrating a news item which he had read in the morning's papers. It was some case of an Oxford undergraduate who had run off with a Don's daughter, and the old man regarded it as a sign of the times with sinister reference to Julian himself.

"In my opinion it's a mistake to send boys to Oxford," said the old man. "It leads them into loose and lazy ways and in nine cases out of ten unfits them for a decent Christian life. I always said so to your father, but, of course, he wouldn't listen to me."

"Now, Grandfather," said Mrs. Perryam, "don't prattle so much, but get on with your dinner."

"Don't you speak to me like that!" answered the old gentleman, irritably. "It's women that prattle. Not men. If they would only listen to what their elders say they would keep out of a deal of mischief. As I was telling you, Julian, about that Oxford lad—"

"I don't want to hear it," said Julian. "It doesn't interest me in the very least."

"Then I won't tell you," said his grandfather, "but it's a portent all the same."

He lapsed into a fretful silence, chewing his food distastefully, and now and again glancing at Julian with reproachful eyes.

After dinner, when Janet had come back with Cyril, Julian went round to the Iffields' house, dragged there as though by a magnet, against his judgment and will power. Major Iffield, as he knew, had gone off to Bournemouth for a night, and the elder Mrs. Iffield was in bed with influenza. Evelyn would be alone.

He found her alone, not at all surprised to see him, and evidently pleased.

"Nice boy!" she said. "He forgives my treachery and comes with magnanimity and good temper."

"On the contrary," said Julian, "I come in a vile temper and without forgiveness. Think what a good time we could have had at Henley!"

"Think what a good time we're going to have now," answered Evelyn. "All alone, without husband, mother-in-law, or any vexations."

She seemed anxious to make amends for her broken engagement, and was so comradely and kind that Julian forgot his ill-temper. She played him his favourite pieces for an hour or more, while he sat smoking as on his first evening in her house, and every now and then she looked across the piano and smiled at him and once kissed the tips of her fingers to him.

Then she drew up a deep arm chair and made him sit in it while she sat at his feet on a footstool and put her head against his knees and smoked one of his cigarettes.

For an hour or more they spoke of casual things—the

tennis tournament at Wimbledon, Janet's new frock, the play they had seen, the French novel she had lent to Julian. Suddenly she announced a piece of news which took Julian's breath away.

"Ted and I are going to Italy for six months or so. In the autumn."

"Six months!"

He spoke after a moment's silence, and there was a tremor in his voice. If she had said six years, or six centuries, it would not have seemed longer—not more of a break to their friendship.

"Yes. We don't start till October. It was Ted's idea, and the mother-in-law's. They fixed it between them. I shall be horribly and disastrously bored. I adore Italy, but the idea of trapesing round with the old lady and her Baedeker —to say nothing of Ted and his plus fours—fills me with terror."

Julian was silent again for a few moments, and then he spoke in a strained voice.

"Why go?" he asked.

Evelyn did not answer him directly. She put her head up and glanced at him sideways.

"As a married woman I'm supposed to obey. Ted's getting suspicious of my friends—Binks—Billy Harker—Cyril Buckland—you, my little one! Drop by drop the mother-in-law's poison works like madness in what he is pleased to call his brain. We've had scenes lately. The tyrant which is in every man begins to assert itself! He's afraid for me!"

"It's an outrage!" said Julian, hotly.

"Yes," said Evelyn. "I'm being carried off like a captive."

"It's unfair!" said Julian. "What's going to happen to *me?*"

He was hardly aware of his words, and only conscious of a numbness in his heart because this girl was going away from him for six months which was as long as for ever. It would be insufferable. He would feel cut in half without her. All the interest of life would go with her.

Evelyn put her hand on his knee.

"Poor Julian! We've been good friends, haven't we? You'll miss me a little bit?"

"I shall miss you like Hell!" said Julian, in a low, passionate voice.

Evelyn laughed a little at that.

"It's not an elegant simile, Julian! Am I as wicked as all that?"

"You know what I mean," said Julian. "Or rather, you don't know what I mean. I just can't do without you. I might as well be dead or blind. You mustn't go, Evelyn. Don't you know I love you like blazes?"

"As hot as that?" she asked.

She was kneeling before him now, with her elbows on his knees and her little pointed chin on her folded hands, looking into his eyes.

Julian avoided her look, and spoke low, with a queer thrill in his voice.

"I've called it friendship up to now. It was your word. But I've been lying to myself. It's different from friendship. It's the real thing, I suppose. I mean it's love as far as I'm concerned. What the dickens am I going to do about it—if you go off and leave me in the lurch? Or if you don't? I suppose I'm in the cart anyway. As you're married and all that."

Evelyn Iffield smiled at him with her head on one side.

"I've been a wicked little cat," she said. "I oughtn't to have let you get like that. You're too young to—hurt. Sorry, Julian!"

Julian stood up, so that her hands fell from his knees, and he turned away from her, so that she should not see his face.

"I *am* hurt," he said. "It's going to knock me edgewise."

She still knelt there, as he had left her, looking at him with a queer little smile about her lips and a look of amusement in her dark eyes.

He went on speaking in a jerky monologue, to himself rather than to her.

"I was an awful fool. So sure of myself. Platonic

friendship, and all that—Modern Youth and its point of view! As if human nature altered! I might have known I should be caught out—and I wanted to play the game by Major Iffield. He's been frightfully decent to me, and he loves every hair of your head, and after all he *is* your husband!"

"Yes," said Evelyn. "After all he is my husband!"

She spoke quietly, but with a little irony, as though secretly amused.

Julian faced round on her, and his voice rang out rather loudly.

"Evelyn, just tell me this. Have you been playing about with me? Am I just a kid to you—a toy that you wound up just to see how it worked before you broke its spring and let it drop? I'd hate to think that!"

Evelyn's face was swept with colour. His words took the smile from her lips for the first time. She sprang up and came close to him and put her arms about him.

"I'm not so bad as that! Not quite so bad, Julian dear. But, of course, you're wonderfully young compared with me. I wanted you for my comrade. You're so sweet and handsome and fresh! But I didn't want you to get too fond of me. I didn't want to spoil things for you. I'm frightfully sorry!"

Julian looked into her eyes for the first time since his outburst.

"I don't want you to be sorry," he said. "I want to know if you love me as I love you—that is to say, to the exclusion of everything else, and everybody else."

She was tempted to lie to him, knowing that the truth would be very hurtful, but that straight look of his seemed to make her lie difficult.

"Not as far as that," she said. "I can't exclude Ted altogether. He's too big!"

She tried to put him off with a joke, to make him laugh. But he answered with a sudden passion.

"Look here, if you—liked—me we could cut off together. Why not? I'm ready to face the thing through."

She shook her head.

"Not so easy—even if I wanted to. You haven't started a career yet, Julian. We should starve to death."

He answered her with extreme bitterness.

"Oh, I see! You make it a financial matter?"

She looked at him with a whimsical smile, and was not angry.

"Finance enters into these questions. Sad but true! I've not enough for two, and you've not enough for one. Besides, you know, you're a moralist, Julian! You want to play the game. It wouldn't be quite your style of game, would it? Not cricket! Think of poor old Ted, who dotes on me though he *is* a tyrant!"

"You haven't thought of him much," said Julian with angry sarcasm. "You let me kiss you. That wasn't quite the game either to him or to me. You must have known that all this friendship talk was humbug. Our secret meetings, our lonely walks together—didn't you know how they would end, as far as I'm concerned? Yes, you knew all right, and now you draw back, and play the respectable married woman. I don't call that playing the game."

"The old, old story," said Evelyn. "The woman tempted me!"

She gave a satirical little laugh in which there was a note of anger.

"You're rather an egoist, aren't you?" she asked, after a moment's silence. "You don't think of my side of the case. You were tempted. Well, don't you think I've been tempted by your White Knight manners, your boyish gallantries, your ardour and eagerness? I'm five years older than you! Yes, I ought to have known better. But it's because of those five years' difference that my temptations are greater than yours. For me time is slipping away, with a dull husband and a watchful mother-in-law. I see my youth being wasted, this beauty of mine. The end of adventure! . . . Why, it's wonderful that I'm still loyal to Ted. I ought to wear a halo—though it might slip off one day. You never can tell. And as for you, Julian, I thought you were one of the modern young men, who could understand comradeship, and

keep cool, and not go off the deep end like the romantic youth of yesterday. You've always said so!"

"I was a perfect ass to say so," was Julian's answer, in a less broken voice. "And I think you knew from the beginning that it wouldn't work. You've had experience."

"Oh, well, if you put it like that," said Evelyn, becoming rather pale, "I've no pity for you. You can leave this house at once, and I'll console myself with older friends whose manners belong to the age of chivalry which has disappeared with the younger crowd. Cyril Buckland, *par exemple,* who may be less innocent but is more respectful."

There was complete silence between them. It was broken by Julian who spoke in a beaten way.

"I deserve that. I was a cad to say such things. I ought to be kicked. But I don't know what the deuce to do. I'm knocked all ends up because I love you most frightfully, and it's made hay of all my notions. When you go away I shall be lost. What's the use of life without you, Evelyn? I want you as I want life itself, and it's no use pretending."

She held out her hands to him, all her anger gone, and a look of pity in her dark eyes. But he turned away from her and put his hands up to his face. In a moment she was by his side, her arms round his neck.

"Julian, I'm sorry! I oughtn't to have let things get like this! It's quite true what you said. It amused me to play with you, and I loved your comradeship. But I didn't know I'd hurt you so much. My poor boy! My poor little lover! So young! So fresh! . . . Oh, I know I've hurt you, and I'm sorry beyond words, Julian."

She dragged his head down and kissed him, and he put his arms about her and returned her kisses and said silly things.

"It's all right, Evelyn, so long as we're friends. I'm not such a cad. I'll go away. Of course you've got to stick to your husband, and all that. Let's play the game. Only I wish it hadn't happened like this. Making a fool of myself!"

She said "Hush! Hush!" and kissed him again.

It was then that the door opened and the elder Mrs. Iffield stood in the room, looking at them both, listening, with

a cold fury in her pale eyes. She was in a dressing gown of grey silk, covering her night gown, and her white hair was uncoiled and tied behind with a black ribbon. She looked an austere, sinister, frightening figure.

"Evelyn," she said quietly, "you had better come to bed. I shall tell your husband to-morrow. I don't know what he will do. This kind of thing is beyond all sufferance."

Evelyn faced round on her.

"You can tell him what you like, mother. He's too loyal to believe your sinister suggestions."

The elder Mrs. Iffield turned to Julian and spoke to him with a hard kind of pity.

"I don't blame you very much, Mr. Perryam. You're too young to understand the character of Evelyn. You're not the only boy whose heart she has broken. She is innately immoral, and quite without compassion."

All the colour ebbed from Evelyn's face, leaving it dead white, her dark eyes shining with a fire of hate.

"Go to your room, mother," she commanded. "My innate immorality as you call it is not so poisonous as your evil old mind, spying, watching, plotting, hinting, slandering, making mischief between me and Ted. One day you'll drive me into wickedness. Just to get away from you. Why can't you keep to your bed instead of crawling down here like a witch in a fairy tale?"

The elder Mrs. Iffield took a seat in a high-backed chair near the piano.

"I am here to defend my son's honour," she said grimly. "I shall stay here until this young man has gone."

It was a ludicrous as well as a tragic situation, but only Evelyn saw the comic side of it.

She gave a shrill laugh and put her hand on Julian's arm.

"You had better go, dear Julian," she said. "My delightful mother-in-law is as obstinate as a Flanders mule, and my love for her is so great that I shouldn't like her to catch a death of cold. In spite of her sense of propriety she's not ashamed of appearing before a young gentleman in nothing but a night gown and a bit of silk. That's Early Victorian!"

Julian was deeply embarrassed and distressed. Some

revelation came to him of the forces of hate and suspicion at work in this house between these two women, the old woman with her suspicion and dislike, Evelyn with her youth and gaiety and sense of revolt, the husband trying to keep peace between them. What torture for Evelyn! No wonder she yearned for the adventure of youth! . . . He left the house alone, shutting the front door quietly behind him, and as he walked down the drive he knew that something had happened to him which had quite changed his outlook on life. Something had broken inside him. He was no longer a boy, but a man hurt by life. It was not his heart that was broken. Modern science disbelieved in that. It was his pride, his sense of superiority to life, his arrogance. He had believed himself immune from passion, and suddenly he had crashed into its flaming gulfs. He had believed in the immunity of modern youth from the folly of unreasonable romance, and here he was its victim and its plaything. He had believed that his code—"playing the game"—was impregnable against the assaults of the baser temptations, and here he had found himself panting with love for a married woman whose husband he liked—qualifying for a column in the divorce news of *The Week*.

A sense of shame and humiliation overwhelmed him. How scornful he would have been of any Oxford friend who had confessed to such a thing! And worst of all, he was madly in love with a girl who had just played with him, teasing him into love, just to amuse herself, watching his ardour grow to white heat as an experiment in psychology, breaking him like a toy and then feeling a little sorry for her carelessness. She was sorry, yes, but that was hardly good enough! . . .

He cried out in the darkness as he walked home, and it was like the cry of a wounded animal.

XXII

JULIAN avoided the attention of his family—he was conscious of a woebegone face and hang-dog look—by leaving the house immediately after an early lunch and motoring aimlessly round the countryside at a breakneck pace.

In the light of day the episode of the previous evening seemed remote and improbable. Had he really broken down so hopelessly and lost control of his steering gear in such a weak and ridiculous way as his memory suggested? He had behaved like a perfect cad to Evelyn, and she had been wonderfully patient and kind with him. She had not asked for his egregious display of passion and temper, and that scene when the elder Mrs. Iffield had appeared—"like a witch in a fairy tale"—had been all his fault. Evelyn had tried to comfort him like an elder sister with a small boy who had fallen down and cut his knees and started howling. There was nothing more in her kisses than that. He had put her completely into the cart. The mother-in-law would report to the Major, and there would be the devil to pay—mostly by Evelyn. Probably Major Iffield would come round and want to bash his head. Well, he deserved it. Anyhow, he would have to clear out. That was certain. Now that he had made such an ass of himself and found himself out—it had been a pretty finding!—he couldn't even claim Evelyn's comradeship. He couldn't trust himself to resume the old relationship, which in any case had been a fraud on his part. Platonic friendship! Not with Evelyn playing on every nerve, thrilling him by the slightest touch, laugh, movement, or word! Evelyn was not like the Audreys of the world. There was some magic in her, some terrific pull of attraction, such a lure as made Ulysses tie himself to the mast when the sirens called. . . . He would have to clear out, and try to mend

the broken bits of himself, and pretend to some other interest in life. What interest? He stared down a cold vista of years without Evelyn and they looked remarkably dreary. His light had gone out. There would be no more laughter for him. Everything would be one huge boredom and futility. But he couldn't stay in Evelyn's neighbourhood, from now till October. For her sake as well as his own he would have to get away. How? Where? What to do? He would have to think it out. . . .

While he was thinking it out, with a frown on his forehead and the sun in his eyes, he saw a black figure in the road before him and a hand raised. He recognised the young priest, Father Rivington, to whom he had been introduced one night by Audrey. He stood there smiling when Julian pulled up within a yard of him.

"Sorry!" he said. "Are you by any chance going Westcott way? I want to call on Frank Nye, and it's a bit of a slog! My push-bike has crocked up."

Julian hesitated. He did not feel like calling on Frank Nye, in spite of Audrey's plea for him to "keep an eye" on her brother. He didn't feel like any kind of human intercourse with this crisis in his mind. But he had no definite journey before him, and it seemed uncivil to refuse.

"By all means!" he answered.

"If you're not pushed for time you might like a glass of good cider," said the young priest. "My house is not a stone's throw away."

Julian refused, and then, being pressed, yielded. There was something friendly about this fellow which he liked. And he had a queer thought about him which prevented the refusal of a kindly invitation. This young man—Evelyn's age, perhaps—was a priest and dedicated to perpetual celibacy. The lure of women—and he must meet them about the roads of life—must mean nothing to him. By his priestly vows he would have to resist even Evelyn's grace and beauty. All the Evelyns of life! How on earth did he manage it? What secret did he hold to guard himself against passion, and such an episode as that of last night? He was a tall, good-looking fellow and looked

human. Damn queer! It would be good to know his spell word.

The priest took him into his house, a little rose-covered cottage next to a miniature church with a few graves in the churchyard, and left him in the sitting room while he went to fetch the cider. Julian looked about him, and noticed the photograph of a pretty girl on the mantelpiece, and the crest of Merton College over the bookshelf, and a pair of sculls over the doorway. Oxford, and a rowing man. Next to the portrait of the pretty girl were photographs of young officers, and across one of them was scrawled the words, "To the best Padre on the Western Front." A military chaplain in the jolly old war. . . . There were other indications of character and career which told Julian something about the man. On the table was a big prayer book lying by a Dunhill pipe and a tin of John Cotton—strange contiguity! Over the bookshelf was a print of the Madonna and Child after Raphael, and on the bookshelf Julian's eyes caught the titles of the Oxford Book of English Verse, Rupert Brooke's poems, Chesterton's "Dickens," Belloc's "Mercy of Allah," Compton Mackenzie's "Sinister Street," and Young Huxley's "Crome Yellow." A mediævalist, but up to date in his taste of books.

"Not a bad drink on a hot day," said the young priest, coming back with the cider. "If you'd like a whiskey, I can give it you. But I don't recommend it so early in the day!"

"No," said Julian. "It's not a habit of mine."

The priest spoke of Audrey and said, "Splendid girl, I should say. Very angry with me, though!"

"Why?" asked Julian.

Father Rivington hesitated, and then laughed.

"I thought you knew. She thinks I converted her father and made him leave the Church of England."

"Didn't you?" asked Julian, with a touch of hostility at the remembrance.

"Not in the least," said the priest. "I can't flatter myself on that score. Mr. Nye was like Paul on the road to Damascus. He had a blinding vision. I was merely the instrument of his reception into the Catholic Church."

"A damned shame anyhow," said Julian. "It's thrust the whole family into poverty."

The priest was not shocked by his words. He seemed rather amused by them.

"I'm sorry for Mrs. Nye," he said. "It was a bad blow to her. She's getting on in life and it's hard to uproot and change one's whole scheme. She'll be happier when she comes round to her husband's way of thinking. Poverty won't matter after that."

"Why not?" asked Julian. "Poverty is hellish, to my mind."

The young priest laughed.

"It's a relative term, anyhow, and we shall all be poor when the Socialists get into power. Why not? It's better than fat wealth and selfishness. Not that I'm a Socialist! I'm all for liberty and the rights of the individual."

"I thought you were a Catholic priest," said Julian, with cold satire.

"So I am."

"Well, in that case, you believe in suppressing the individual. The tyranny of faith and all that. Unalterable dogma, to believe or go to blazes."

"Well, we have our faith," said Father Rivington. "Within that there's liberty, for every kind of type, crank, rebel, reformer, idealist, oddity."

Julian did not pursue the subject. He did not wish for theological discussion, especially with a Catholic priest, with all his arguments cut and dried.

"Do you get any society here?" he asked.

Father Rivington mentioned one or two families. His particular patron was Lady Lavington, the young war widow. She looked after the flowers in his church, and was very helpful and kind. Did Julian know her at all?

Yes, Julian had met her. She was a remarkably pretty woman with dark hair and eyes.

He sat silent for a moment, thinking intently, while the young priest watched him with friendly eyes. Then he asked a direct, startling question.

"What would happen if you fell in love with her?"

Father Rivington was certainly startled. He sat up with a jerk, and his face flushed.

"Look here—Perryam!"

Then he laughed heartily, without a trace of anger left in his expression.

"That was rather a knock-out blow. But I see your point. You mean, supposing I fell in love—as a Catholic priest—with any charming lady who happened to be kind and helpful?"

"Yes," said Julian. "What would you do about it? Very awkward, wouldn't it be?"

"Extremely awkward," said Father Rivington.

His lips were curled into a humorous smile and his eyes were mirthful.

"These things happen," said Julian. "It's useless to pretend they don't. You're human, I suppose, like the rest of us."

Though he did not know it, he had given himself away to this priest, as though he had told a plain tale. Father Rivington's eyes rested on him with a little smiling pity in which was understanding.

"Extremely human," he said. "Subject to all the ordinary laws of nature, including temptation. But of course we have to resist. That's all."

"Not easy," said Julian.

"Not at all easy," said the priest. "Mental agony, sometimes, I daresay. But of course we get a good deal of help. Faith, prayer, love of God, the ordinary decent code of honour, belonging to most gentlemen—playing the game and all that—and loyalty to our vows. On the whole we avoid trouble. We call it technically 'avoiding the occasion of sin.' Put into vulgar parlance one might say we give these things a miss as much as possible."

"I see," said Julian, without conviction.

Father Rivington searched his face with his friendly eyes.

"When fellows I know get mixed up with women they can't marry unless they want to be disloyal to their code,

I always advise them to do a bunk. It's safest. It's no good playing around. Of course if they believe in prayer—"

"I don't," said Julian.

"Then it's more difficult," said Father Rivington. "But even in that case, when fellows have no religion of any kind, there's a sort of worldly wisdom that's helpful. I always think, for instance, that counteracting interests are worth trying. What they call the sublimation of sex in the Freudian jargon."

"What the devil's that?" asked Julian.

"Oh, working out one's imagination and vitality in other ways—literature, sport, politics, art, any job in life. After all, these love episodes are only one phase of life. Not so enormously important as to wreck one's whole mind, and weaken one's will power until one is merely the slave of passion. The romanticists are to blame for a good deal of that stuff. They dwell on it, fuss over it, over-emphasise it, wallow in it, make a dark tragedy over trivialities of sentiment. I like a fellow to take a knock, square his shoulders, and face up to life as a whole."

"It sounds good," said Julian, with his habitual touch of sarcasm.

The young priest smiled.

"I admit it's not easy always. It's the best line of action though, barring supernatural aid. What you call superstition, I expect."

"Yes," said Julian.

"By Jove," said the priest, drawing a deep breath and changing the subject as though his thoughts had suddenly jumped a length, "there's such a lot to do in the world, and the younger crowd isn't doing it. That's what makes me disheartened. These little love affairs! Oh, Lord! . . . When old Europe is on the edge of a precipice, and all our leaders are like sleep walkers, and if we're not damned careful we shall find ourselves in the fiery pit again, tearing at each other's throats. When's Youth going to take things seriously and give a new lead to the world?"

"I fancy I've heard that question before," said Julian.

"Any answer?" asked Father Rivington, with a straight look.

"Youth doesn't care a damn," said Julian. "Why should it? And what is Youth, anyhow? I'm Youth! I can't even shape my own life, to say nothing of the world, which is an unknown quantity, as far as I'm concerned, full of nasty old men, slanderous women, bloody fools, and rather decent, stupid, well-meaning people who read *The Week* and other journals of low quality and large circulations."

This priest who had been an Oxford Blue and a padre in the Great War, sat nursing his knee thoughtfully, and it was quite a time before he answered.

"There's more in the world than that. There are millions of people waiting for a lead, a call to the spirit, a little more light. They're not stupid. They're only bewildered. They're not bloody fools. They have, mostly, a wonderful commonsense which wants to be spiritualised and guided. If you call to the worst in them, the worst will come out. If you call to the best you will get it too, like a miracle. Look at the sacrifice of youth in the War. Those boys!— The wonder of them, in mud and lice and shell fire and stinking death. Heroic beyond words. Immortal in their courage and quality of spirit. On every fighting front, and on both sides of the line! Something ought to come out of that. It can't all be wasted. There is still that spirit in the world if we don't fritter it away, and lapse into carelessness, and forget those fellows who died in the trenches that we might live, and make a better world to live in."

Julian sat there moodily. He had heard these things before—too often. Yet somehow this priest fellow spoke of them with less cant and more honesty. He had seen those fighting men and lived with them. He had known the realities of war. Probably he had lived daily with death round him, and with him. It must have been rather frightful, in spite of the adventure. And it was pretty good that he still had a kind of optimism in life and the commonsense of men—given "a call to the spirit"—whatever that

might mean. Anyhow he was a gentleman, and well-meaning.

"Aren't we talking rather a lot?" asked Julian. "What about that fellow Frank Nye?"

The young priest jumped up from his chair.

"Yes, you're right, and I've bored you stiff!"

They went back to Julian's machine, and on the way to Westcott the priest mentioned casually that Frank Nye seemed as happy as a bird with the girl he had found.

"I'm persuading them to get married," he said.

Julian gave a jerk to his steering wheel.

"Good God! That's a crime, isn't it?"

The priest seemed to see a joke somewhere.

"I hope not. . . . They're jibbing a little. Especially the girl who doesn't want to drag Frank down. She seems to think she would drag him down more if she wore a wedding ring. As a matter of fact, I think she'll raise him up. She's no end of a good sort, I fancy."

"A coster or something, isn't she?" asked Julian.

"Not a bit of it," said the priest. "Comes of yeoman stock—the best in England—though it's true the father is a market gardener in a small way and inclined to get fuddled in local pubs. But a sturdy old man and devoted to Frank."

"Poor devil!" said Julian, alluding to Frank and not to the father.

"Old Horton used to be a Papist before he forgot his penny catechism," said Father Rivington. "The girl is just a pagan, but I have hopes of her."

"More proselytising!" said Julian. "They'd have burnt you at the stake a few centuries ago."

"Yes. I shan't get martyrdom," said Father Rivington. "Unless," he added cheerfully, "England goes Bolshevik!"

Frank Nye was slightly, but not very much, embarrassed to see Julian and the young priest step into his market garden. He was in khaki breeches and gaiters and his old blue shirt, with the wire-haired terrier at his heels with whom Julian had first met him on the road to Clandon. He had been working in some strawberry beds, and his

hands were stained with red juice. By his side was a tall girl with a ruddy face, and hazel eyes, and a mass of honey-coloured hair. She wore a blue overall the colour of Frank's shirt and a lavender sun-bonnet under which she blushed very deeply at the sight of the two young men.

"Hullo, Padre," said Frank. "Come to make more mischief in a humble Surrey village? How's that family of mine whom you've cast into ruin?"

"Your father's got a job," said the priest. "Travelling a History of England on the hire system. Thinks it a great joke."

"He would," said Frank drily. "He'd praise God and laugh heartily at the lovely jest of life if his wife and children dropped dead of starvation. That's the consolation of your simple faith!"

The girl laid her hand on Frank's arm and laughed.

"You shouldn't talk like that," she said.

"Oh, I'm a truth-teller," said Frank. "I say what I mean, and mean what I say. A rare quality, these days."

He gave his fruit-stained hand to Julian and said, "That's strawberry juice, not the blood of innocents. How's everything?"

"More or less the same," said Julian. "Do you like this as well as Banking?"

Frank grimaced at him.

"A damned sight better. *Mens sana in corpore sano.* It's the open air, anyhow, with the sun on my face. And you should see me among the fruits and flowers of the earth. They grow while I look at 'em. I talk to them and they burgeon!"

The girl in the lavender sun-bonnet laughed again.

"That's true. He's a wonder in the garden. Father thinks a lot of him."

Frank pulled her by the ear.

"Oh, does he? Well, I don't think much of Father. The drunken old devil!"

He put his hand to his mouth and shouted "Father! . . . Come and talk nicely to the pretty gentlemen!"

An elderly man with a bronzed bearded face under an

old straw hat stepped out of a greenhouse and strolled down the pathway of red bricks between the strawberry beds, smoking a short pipe.

Julian thought he had the look of an Elizabethan seaman and liked his hazel eyes—the colour of his daughter's. He lifted his hat with a touch of dignity and said, "Good day, gentlemen. Thirsty weather!"

Frank gave him a dig with his elbow and roared with laughter.

"Hark at that! Always thinking of beer!"

"Yes," said Mr. Horton. "I like my drop of beer. But when I say thirsty weather I mean for the soil which is fair parched."

He turned to the young priest and nodded towards Frank.

"That young fellow is always having his bit of fun! But he's good in the garden. Made a wonderful change already."

"Come and have a look round," said Frank.

Julian went with him through the garden and into the greenhouses, listening to Frank Nye's remarks of a technical nature without much understanding, knowing nothing of horticulture.

"I suppose you think I'm a fool to go in for this sort of thing?" asked Frank presently. "A low grade job, eh?"

"Is there any future in it?" asked Julian doubtfully.

"Oh, hang the future!" said Frank. "This present is as far as I look."

He glanced at Julian with a sidelong smile, in a quizzing way.

"What do you think of my Nancy? Below the caste line I expect."

"She seems nice," said Julian, in a non-committal way.

"Rotten word 'nice,'" said Frank. "She's worth all your pretty ladies. More truth in her. More sense. Anyhow she's my mate—and she thinks I'm a fairy prince! Finds all the virtues in me! Would kiss my muddy boots. That's worth something, I guess."

"Lots," said Julian.

He had a touch of envy of Audrey's brother. It was

good to have a "mate." He would never have one. All that was finished for him.

"The padre wants to marry us and make us respectable," said Frank in his blunt whimsical way. "Rather old-fashioned, don't you think, and quite unnecessary? Still it would please the governor who thinks I'm living in a state of sin. I really don't mind either way. Nance is afraid to fasten the shackles on me. Thinks I might want to break away one day, and doesn't want to stand in my light."

"Perhaps you might," said Julian. "If you happened to fall in love with a girl of your own class."

Frank answered impatiently, with a jerk of the head.

"Oh, damn my class! I've finished with that. *Nobilitas virtus non stemma,* and all the rest of it, as I was taught to say at Marlborough."

He laughed to himself, as though pleased with this Latin tag, and then switched off to another line of thought.

"The padre is after Nance. God's love, Hell fires, and all that. Well, I don't mind. Women seem to want religion. It seems to reconcile them to the absurdities of life. Superstition has its uses."

"So I'm beginning to think," said Julian. He thought back to his conversation with Father Rivington. The fellow seemed to get some strength from his religion, a power of resistance, and even a cheerful acceptance of things like poverty, and self-sacrifice, and death, as he had found it in war. It was worth having, perhaps—a faith like that in unbelievable things!

"How's Audrey?" he asked, abruptly.

"Got a job and reinforcing the Governor's weekly wage," said Frank. He said it was "something in the slums"—typist secretary to a Labour Member with a bug for reforming the world.

"Poor old Audrey!" he said. "No fun catching the early train and stinting her healthy appetite with an egg on toast at lunch time. I've had some!"

Julian sent his love to her, and said good-bye, and motored off without Father Rivington who accepted Frank's invitation to tea.

XXIII

ON his return home Julian was instantly aware of sensational, and extremely disagreeable happenings. It was old Mary who revealed them to him with winks and nods and whispers.

"That Major Iffield! He wants to see you, Master Julian. Looking as black as thunder, and sitting in the study with a copy of *The Morning Post*. Old Mrs. Iffield was round here after lunch making mischief, I'll be bound, the old creature! Your Ma is looking that worried!"

Julian felt himself getting pale, and his heart gave a thump. So all the fat was in the fire! Well, he had expected it.

"How long has Major Iffield been here?" he asked, trying to steady his voice, and failing.

Old Mary said half an hour, and whispered something about the folly of old men who married young wives.

"Asking for it in my humble opinion," said old Mary.

Julian told her to hold her tongue, and strode away to the study and opened the door. Major Iffield sat in the big chair by the window. *The Morning Post* had dropped to the floor by his side and he was smoking a cigar and staring into the garden. He rose when Julian came into the room, and said "Hullo, Perryam!" and held out his hand in his usual friendly way.

Julian shook hands with him, not without a sense of embarrassment and something like shame. He wished the Major had *not* held out his hand.

"Sorry to invade your house like this," said the Major.

"Not at all," said Julian. "Sit down, won't you?"

The Major sat down, and Julian took a seat on the high fender and lit a cigarette. It was plain that Major Iffield was ill at ease, and even distressed. He cleared his throat huskily and Julian noticed that the cigar which he held in his left hand trembled.

"I'm on an absurd errand," he said, with an uneasy laugh. "It's about what happened last night."

He glanced over at Julian and then looked away while a little colour was creeping up his neck to his tanned face.

"Don't think I'm going to get angry or anything," he continued. "I shouldn't have come here at all unless my mother had been to see Mrs. Perryam."

"What about?" asked Julian, coldly.

Major Iffield laughed again uneasily.

"I daresay you can guess."

He rose from his chair and dropped his cigar in a flower pot on the window sill, and faced Julian squarely.

"We had better talk straight," he said. "The fact is, Perryam, that although I'm tolerant and easy-going and all that, I don't like young fellows to kiss my wife and indulge in amorous adventures at my expense. See what I mean?"

"Yes," said Julian. "There's your point of view of course."

He spoke with an air of cold and judicial calm, not revealing the emotion which seemed to beat like a little drum in his left ear.

"Exactly," said Major Iffield. "My point of view has to be considered. My honour, to put it bluntly, though I don't want to talk heroics."

He clasped and unclasped his big golf-playing hands behind his back.

"Leaving honour on one side for a moment—it's a question of happiness, really. For you and Evelyn as well as myself. If this kind of thing goes too far it leads to—unhappiness—all round. . . . See what I mean?"

Julian saw exactly what he meant. But what could he answer this man, this strong, good-natured, easy-going man who was talking so quietly, so dispassionately, in such a friendly, argue-it-out sort of way? If he had tried to do a little head bashing it would have been easier.

"Of course," said Major Iffield, "it's always a mistake—almost a crime sometimes—for a fellow of my age to marry a young girl. I mean it's so jolly rough on the girl. Especially when she's like Evelyn—as playful as a kitten

and all that, and keen on having all the fun of the fair. She belongs to the younger generation in that way. Restless, you know. Without fixed principles. With a different code from old fogeys like me. Doesn't believe much in duty and so forth, and is rather wilful and out for a game at any price. At any risk! That makes it difficult. Don't you agree?"

"Very difficult," said Julian, wishing to Heaven the ground would open up and swallow him.

"I can see Evelyn's point of view all right," continued the Major. "I'm a devilish dull person—and then of course there's my mother. That doesn't make it easier."

He sighed heavily, and then laughed a little.

"The old story of the mother-in-law, eh? I remember Dan Leno— However! There it is. My mother and Eve don't hit it off together, but I can't turn the old lady out of doors at this time of day. It would break her heart, and after all, she brought me into the world, and made me everything I am. A man owes a duty to his mother. First perhaps, though God knows. They say a man when he's dying thinks of his mother and forgets his wife. Queer that!"

Julian uncrossed his legs as he sat on the high fender, stood up, and spoke in a harsh rasping voice.

"What's all this got to do with it, sir?" he asked, with a nervous impatience he tried to restrain.

Major Iffield had another little wave of colour up the back of his neck.

"I'm showing you the problem," he said. "My difficulties and Evelyn's. I don't want you to think I'm a sort of domestic tyrant—an old ogre of a husband keeping his little wife in a stranglehold, not giving her any rope, and all that. God knows I've given Evelyn lots of rope. Almost too much. I mean I haven't raised Cain because she has lots of friends that I don't particularly approve of. Young fellows hanging around, making sheep's eyes, indulging in flirtation, more or less harmless. If it amuses her, I don't object. I haven't objected!"

"Well then—?" asked Julian.

"Well," said Major Iffield, slowly, "I have to draw the line somewhere. I draw it at what happened last night, Perryam. From what my mother tells me it went a little too far. See what I mean?"

"Not altogether," said Julian, bluffing a little, though he knew he held a weak hand.

"I'm not blaming you," said the Major. "You're very young, if I may say so. I envy you for that, by Jove! At your age one doesn't reckon up consequences. One just goes ahead until the cropper comes. That's natural. I was like it myself—a thousand years ago. But I want to save you from becoming a cropper. That's why I'm here. The point is, young fellow, I want you to promise me that you won't see Evelyn again for some time. It's not good for you. She's my wife, you see, and if you'll take my advice you'll keep away and get on with your job in life, whatever it may be. See what I mean?"

Julian went over to the mantelpiece and shifted one of the vases and then turned and faced Major Iffield and spoke more emotionally than he wanted.

"Look here, Major, I'm damned sorry for all your worry, and I agree with everything you've said except one thing. I can't promise not to see Evelyn again. If she doesn't want to see me that's another thing, but if she beckons with her little finger I shall go to her, wherever it is. It's only fair to tell you that. I should be a liar if I didn't."

Major Iffield stared at him, and breathed rather heavily.

"You mean to say you don't care anything for my happiness? Nothing for your own self-respect, and your father's good name?"

"Quite a lot," said Julian. "As it happens I've decided to clear out of this neighbourhood, for a time anyhow. But if Evelyn sends for me, I shall come. Or if she comes to me I shall wipe out all the rest. Don't you understand, sir? I'd walk on my hands and knees to her. She means everything there is. I can't help myself."

His voice broke a little, and he turned away.

Major Iffield's eyes seemed to soften towards him.

"It was too bad of Evelyn!" he said. "You're too young to play about with. She ought to have known."

He raised his hands a little with a gesture of dismay.

"If only you young people wouldn't play with fire! You're so frightfully reckless, all of you."

He put his hand on Julian's shoulder.

"Look here, young un. Pull yourself together. I hate to say it, but Evelyn was only amusing herself with you. Killing boredom. She doesn't care a damn for you really."

"It's a lie!" said Julian, fiercely. He felt savage because this man was saying bluntly what was his own most hideous thought.

"It's the truth," said Major Iffield. "One day you'll find out. She's a careless little woman, I'm afraid."

He patted Julian's shoulder.

"Now look here! That promise? You won't try and see her again? Say for six months or so? For your own sake?"

"I make no such promise," said Julian.

Major Iffield's mouth hardened and his grip tightened on Julian's shoulder.

"Well, in that case—don't let me find you in my house again. I'm getting old, but I've a strong right arm. See what I mean?"

He waited for an answer, and not getting one, picked up his hat and stick from the window sill and went towards the door. Before he left the room he turned and spoke again, this time in his old friendly way.

"I'm sorry about all this. Forget it, old boy. There are better things to do in life, for young fellows like you. Play the bigger game! It's worth it."

He left the room, and Julian, alone in the study, with his arms on the mantelpiece, heard Major Iffield's heavy boots scrunching down the gravel path.

XXIV

HE had a series of conversations that evening which put a tremendous strain on his nervous system, as he found when he flung himself onto his bed and felt utterly exhausted in mind and body.

Janet had made big eyes at him at dinner and winked once or twice in a knowing, sympathetic way which gave him no comfort. His mother, whom he had avoided since Major Iffield's visit by going up to his room and locking the door before changing for dinner, glanced at him once or twice in an anxious way and tried to cover up his deep unbroken silence by a bright conversation full of local gossip. His grandfather put both feet into the trough, as it were, by referring to Major Iffield's visit, wondering what the fellow wanted, and announcing that young Mrs. Iffield had rather taken his fancy at the garden party and seemed to have more sense than most young women of her age. Janet, with great tact, switched him off from this line of thought by asking his opinion of Lloyd George, and getting his considered judgment, lasting from the fish to dessert, that the man had sold his soul for office, was undoubtedly in league with the Russian Bolsheviks, and was probably receiving money from the Germans in return for letting them off their debts. Janet countered these libellous statements by the bold assertion that Lloyd George was the greatest and noblest little man in the world and that if people had only followed his advice the world wouldn't be in such a jolly old mess. By this means she engineered a pretty little quarrel with the old gentleman which she maintained in a sprightly and aggressive way, as an aid of sisterly comradeship. Julian's father, who looked rather tired and harassed, nearly spoilt this encounter by observing that Janet had expressed precisely the opposite opinion only a fortnight before, when he had upheld Lloyd George's attitude regarding France and German reparations. When she

slapped his hand and said, "Don't you interfere, Dad! This is a private scrap between me and Grandfather," he asked her not to goad the old man too much, as it wasn't good for his health.

"Anyhow," he said, "let's choose a brighter topic of conversation. Julian looks very gloomy this evening. He hasn't uttered a word the whole meal. What's the matter, old boy?"

It was obvious that Mrs. Perryam had not yet confided the story of Evelyn to her husband, as doubtless she had received it with sinister suggestions from the elder Mrs. Iffield, and passed it on to Janet. Mr. Perryam was plainly ignorant of the bombshell that had burst in his household.

"A game of pills, old boy?" Janet had suggested after dinner, and Julian had nodded.

They had not had a real "powwow" as they called it since that night at the Jazz club. Julian's intention to act the moral censor to this pretty sister of his had faded out in view of his own adventure of soul after the journey home with Evelyn and what had happened afterwards. He had been afraid of Janet's sharp tongue and her admirable chance of *tu quoque.*

This evening she had rather shocked him by her amazing intuitions and almost cynical amusement regarding his painful situation. Standing with her back to the billiard room door, she had announced her knowledge of the whole affair long before "old mother Iffield" had come round with her tale of woe. She had long suspected that Julian was carrying on in a rather hectic way with Evelyn. Did he think she had no eyes in her head, or no ears for the little whisperings of her intimate friends? Why, he had given himself away completely by his absent-mindedness, his look of love's young dream—as early as breakfast time!—his morbid silences, his disappearances. He had been seen with Evelyn on Box Hill. By whom? Oh, well, never mind! He had been observed hand in hand with the lady between Westcott and Dorking. Spies? Did he imagine in his simple innocence that a young man of his appearance could walk out with a girl like Evelyn without attracting the

attention of the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, to say nothing of nurse-maids, servant girls, old ladies in bath chairs, old ladies in open carriages, old ladies lying in watch behind their window blinds in wayside bungalows?

"You might have played the game more carefully, old boy!" was Janet's leading reproach.

She had no sense of disapproval from a moral point of view, it seemed. Julian noticed that, with a secret surprise and uneasiness. She seemed to think it was rather comical that he should have fallen in love with a married girl. Only she asked him to "go easy" with Evelyn, because that young lady, in her opinion, was likely to let him down without a moment's consideration. She was one of those girls who had no compunction, and was just out for a good time from any man who would give it them.

"Not altogether nice," said Janet. "Not true to our kind of code."

Julian had demanded what kind of code she referred to. As far as he could make out she didn't seem to possess a code. Anyhow he was afraid the code didn't work when it happened to get a jolt.

"Good gracious, yes!" said Janet. "I believe in loyalty. If you love a man you've got to play the game by him. And if you don't love him, it isn't fair to play about. That's how I work it out."

Julian had been angry with her and accused her of knowing far too much for her age, and thinking of things which ought not to be in her head at all—at nineteen years of age!

"My dear Julian," said Janet calmly, "a girl of my age is years older than a boy of yours. We're born with the inherited knowledge of æons of womanhood—full of self-protective instincts, primæval wiles, and evolutionary wisdom. Besides, one reads, one learns a little even from H. G. Wells and the daily papers."

"Damn it!" said Julian. "I don't know what we're all coming to!"

He suddenly had a sense of fear about her and grabbed hold of her arm.

"Look here, Jenny, don't you go and do silly things. You're frightfully pretty, you know, and men are awful swine. I'm on the edge of a precipice myself, but if you fell in it would kill the mater and the poor old governor."

"You're getting morbid," said Janet, laughing at him. "I'm quite able to take care of myself, thanks very much."

"What about Cyril?" asked Julian. "Do you really care for the brute?"

"As much as you care for Evelyn, and a bit more," she told him. "And if you don't make friends with him you shan't be friends with me. So there!"

"Well, I'll have a shot at it for your sake," he said, and gave her a kiss on the cheek, which was not a habit of his with his sister. "All the same, I have my doubts of him. He wants watching."

"He's all right," said Janet. "One of the best!"

Well, that was his talk with Janet, not leading anywhere, and disturbing. It was interrupted by his mother, who came in and sent Janet away on some pretext or other, and then came and put her hands on Julian's shoulders and looked into his eyes with a queer, comical, jealous, anxious smile, and said, "Oh, my dear! Now what have you been doing?"

Julian felt something break in him, and put his head down on her shoulder, and but for the pride in him would have cried like a small boy. As it was there was a moisture in his eyes when he raised his head again and gave a little laugh, and said, "It's a silly sort of business altogether!"

"That little creature!" said Mrs. Perryam angrily, scornfully, and with real passion. "That horrid little cat!"

Julian knew her meaning. It was an attack on Evelyn. He could not stand for that.

"Now look here, mother, none of that! It wasn't her fault in the very least. I just lost my head about her. She didn't ask me to!"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Perryam, "of course not! It's never the woman who plays the hussy!"

She spoke with extreme sarcasm, and added outrageous words.

"I'd like to wallop her!"

Julian smiled at that. There was something ludicrous about his mother's passionate desire for a walloping vengeance. It seemed to reduce all argument to absurdity.

"Besides," he said, getting serious again, "what's all the fuss about? I made a fool of myself last night—I suppose the old witch told you all about it?—but I don't see that it's anybody's business but mine."

"I expect Major Iffield had something to say about it!" said Mrs. Perryam.

Julian coloured up.

"He said some rather obvious things, and took a long time saying them. He wants me never to see Evelyn again, or at least a six months' prohibition, and all that sort of tosh. Wanted me to promise. Needless to say I refused. I don't see why one should break up a friendship."

He was arguing against his own judgment, his own confession of the fraud in that word "friendship." It was as though one half of his brain spoke against the other half, instinct against intelligence, desire against conscience.

Mrs. Perryam was silent for a little while, sitting on the edge of the billiard table in her evening frock, looking, as Julian always thought she looked, amazingly beautiful and young.

"It's funny you should say that," she said presently, with a sort of hidden meaning.

"Why?" asked Julian. "It's reasonable, isn't it?"

"I said the same thing myself only yesterday. Just those words. 'I don't see why one should break up a friendship!'"

"I don't follow," said Julian.

He "followed" when his mother spoke rather breathlessly, with a deep flush on her face. It was about Lord Cornford. She had got rather "pally" with him, lately. It was amusing to be waited on hand and foot by a real aristocrat—Norman Conquest and all that!—who had been friendly with Duchesses and a Royal favourite. Grand

manners, of the old school! Very gallant and charming, and kind, and thoughtful. Rather fun to be seen about with him in his carriage and pair, or open Daimler. Made her feel no end stuck up with herself, and saved her from boredom. It was a bit boring with Daddy away all day, and Janet always up to mischief somewhere, and Julian as unsociable as a bear with a sore ear, and Grandfather querulous about everything. There was nothing wrong in liking to hear old Cornford's anecdotes of high life in India. Funny little forgotten scandals. She had been angry with Daddy for being jealous and absurd. She had said, "I don't see why one should break up a friendship!"

"I quite agree," said Julian. "Those stuffy old ideas!"

His mother looked at him under half veiled eyes.

"All the same, Julian, I'm going to break it, my dear. I've written to the old boy to-night to say, 'Mrs. Perryam much regrets,' etc."

"Why?" asked Julian. "In Heaven's name, why?"

"It's safer," said his mother. "In this life, laddy, one has to play for safety. One never knows—until one's dead. Things leap up in one. Even at my age! Pits open before one's feet. In one goes, plop! before you can say Jack Robinson. And then there's the devil to pay!"

She stood up from the billiard table and clasped her son's arm.

"Julian, it's nothing for me to give old Cornford the go-by. No more than dismissing one's butler—though he was a bit of fun! It's going to be hard for you to give up that Evelyn girl. Frightfully hard. I know that, my dear! But I want you to do it before there's the devil to pay."

"Damn the devil!" said Julian, unconscious of the strict orthodoxy of this passionate sentiment.

He refused to make any promise to give up Evelyn, unless she gave him up. But he agreed that he must go away. He couldn't hang about the neighbourhood, with nothing to do but mope. He wasn't as weak as all that. He would have to get a job.

"What sort of job?" asked his mother, doubtfully.

Julian shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"A surrender to the gutter press! I suppose the governor can fix me up on *The Week?*"

Mrs. Perryam did not look quite happy.

"It's a horrible career, Julian. So uncertain, and nerve-wearing. Look at poor old Daddy! Always slaving, and dependent on a man he hates. I wanted you to do something better than that. The jolly old Bar, or something good in the City, with regular hours and a certain salary."

"I want to write one day," said Julian. "I may as well do my apprenticeship. Of course I shall hate it like Hell."

"Well, let's see what Daddy thinks of it."

Julian asked in a shamefaced way if he knew about Evelyn.

His mother nodded.

"Yes, I told him. It was only fair. He's fearfully worried of course. But he won't say a word about it. You know how shy he is of that kind of thing!"

So there had been a conversation with his father—very characteristic of both of them, as Julian was aware, self-consciously. Not a word was said about Evelyn, or the elder Mrs. Iffield's visit, or Major Iffield's ultimatum. All that was carefully avoided, though Julian saw that his father was deeply distressed and alarmed.

Julian had plunged straight into the proposal of getting a job on *The Week.*

"That cuckoo gets on my nerves," he said. "Impossible to write with that damn bird in the neighbourhood. Besides I want to see a bit of London, and I've an idea of sharing digs with one of the Oxford crowd. Prichard, probably. I may as well play around Fleet Street a bit."

"You'll have to work," said Mr. Perryam. "The Old Man won't tolerate hangers-on, not even if he's my son."

"That's all right," said Julian, carelessly. *"Facilis descensus Averni,* and all that."

Mr. Perryam's face flushed a little.

"You're rather arrogant, old lad! Perhaps it will do you a bit of good to be under a news editor who has no reverence for intellectual snobbishness."

It was a rather severe rebuke and his father seemed to regret having spoken it, as soon as the words had left his lips.

"Not that I don't agree with you, old boy. Of course journalism is not an exalted game these days, unless one's a professional idealist on papers that don't pay. One has to pander to the mob mind, and write for the average intelligence which is pretty low. I admit all that! I would rather you adopted any other profession in the world."

In spite of his anxiety to see Julian get to work he pointed out the drawbacks of journalistic life with a bitter note of irony—its insecurity, its futility, its slavery, its dishonesty.

"It's not so bad in the lower ranks," he said. "The reporter has to get his facts right. The sub-editor handles the stuff that comes in and gets order out of chaos. They're not asked to be dishonest. It's only when one directs the policy that one has to shape one's ideals to the whims of interests of the proprietor or group of proprietors, with their political wire-pulling, or financial adventures. I've been the victim of that. I'm the victim of it now. That old ruffian Buckland—the humiliations I have to suffer from him! The muck I have to print to bolster up his schemes or pander to his beastly type of mind! Sometimes, Julian, I can hardly endure it. And then I think of your mother, and all of you, and I swallow my pride, and pocket my ideals. I can't afford to give up three thousand a year, to pace the pavements again. All life is a compromise, as I told you once before."

He was silent, and looked at Julian with troubled eyes.

"I always hoped you would develop some talent for a different kind of career. Engineering—medicine—law—teaching. Something practical and useful. This writing game—journalism—O Lord!"

"Better than playing around in a Surrey garden," said Julian.

It was strange how the position seemed to be reversed—almost ludicrous!

A few weeks ago he had vowed that nothing would induce him to be a journalist and had accused his father of

being a "bought man." Now, when he asked for a job, his father seemed to shrink from it, as though afraid to let him see the secrets in a Chamber of Horrors. He drew his father's attention to the paradox, and Mr. Perryam laughed uneasily.

"Well," he said, "it will give you experience. If you're able to stick it out, old boy, it won't hurt you to have a look at life, from the newspaper angle. I'll give you a note to the Old Man. He'll be glad to tell you his ideas about things, and he likes to be consulted. The old ruffian!"

When he said good night, he suddenly put his arm round his son's shoulder and kissed his cheek. He had not done that since Julian had left Winchester, and it was as though he was conscious that they had come to the parting of the ways, and that his boy whom he had shielded from all brutalities and evil knowledge was about to leave boyhood behind, and face the grim realities of men, and be tested in the furnace of life.

XXV

A MESSAGE arranging an appointment with Victor Buckland was brought by Cyril, who was extremely cynical on the subject of his father.

"The Old Man wants to see you to-morrow morning. If he gives you a job, which is certain, considering your governor's position, I don't mind telling you your young soul will be sullied before you draw your first month's salary. It's a dirty game—though very profitable. The Old Man has risen to fame and fortune by pandering to the worst instincts of half-baked humanity; slightly disguised by religious sentiment, the quest of Truth, and the patriotism of the pub parlour. A wonderful combination conducted with real genius, and unfailing as a money maker."

"It will give me a bit of experience," said Julian, carelessly.

"It certainly will!" said Cyril. "Personally I've no use for it. It's too squalid for my sensitive soul. I'm content to let the Old Man corrupt public opinion—with your father's able assistance—while I spend as much of his ill-gotten gold as I can persuade him to part with. And I must say he doesn't jib very often at my somewhat expensive way of life."

The appointment was fixed for ten o'clock the following morning at Hindhead. Julian motored over from Gorse Hill and arrived at Pyxham Park at a quarter to ten, driving through the great iron gates surmounted by the lion *couchant* of the Burtons who had dwelt here for four centuries until the year after the war when they entered the ranks of the New Poor and sold their house and land to this newspaper proprietor.

It was a handsome place which made Julian's home at Gorse Hill look like a suburban villa. The house itself, rebuilt in Georgian times on the site of a Tudor mansion,

was imposing rather than beautiful, in white stone with a pillared façade, but the park, with its formal Italian gardens beyond the paddocks and pasture land was enchanting. An avenue of tall beeches led towards the house, and beyond were lawns banked round with rhododendrons now, on this June morning, afire with scarlet and purple flowers. To the right of the house the ground was terraced and flanked by a stone balustrade with sculptured figures of Greek goddesses decorously draped to suit the sentiment of Eighteenth Century England with its classical interests but respectable traditions. Bathing pools and lily ponds, and an ornamental fountain, were below the terraces, and beyond there were fruit gardens with a high wall for peaches. Through the line of beeches as he drove up Julian saw Alderney cattle in fields of buttercups, and on the other side of the avenue was a herd of fallow deer. It was a comforting sight to a young man about to enter the field of literature. Certainly it was not without a rich harvest, for those who had talent—and a little luck, no doubt.

Julian left his car in the drive, and walked up the steps of the great house, not without trepidation. He had not been favourably impressed with Victor Buckland's manner at the garden party, and his father had always spoken of him with a mixture of contempt, hatred, and a little fear. But upon this interview with him depended a great deal. It would decide Julian's future life, for good or evil. Momentarily Julian was seized with apprehension. Wasn't it rather foolhardy of him to ask for this job? He was utterly unsuited for journalistic life. He would hate it like poison, and anyhow it would be fatiguing after the leisured life of Oxford and the thoughtful idleness of Gorse Hill. He would be plunged into the vortex if old Buckland gave him the password. Even his father's influence could not shield him from its squalor, and the company of half-baked people who dressed in the wrong way and took liberties with the King's English. . . . However, it would get him to London and out of the dangerous neighbourhood of Evelyn. He would have to face it.

He faced a young footman in the front hall who was

reading a copy of *The Morning Post* before a wood fire.

"Well, what is it?" asked this young man, with a touch of arrogance.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Victor Buckland," said Julian even more haughtily.

The footman seemed to doubt it.

"In writing?" he asked.

"More or less," said Julian. "I'm Mr. Perryam's son."

The footman became civil.

"Quite right, sir. I thought you might be a reporter fellow. They come down here sometimes asking for jobs. Mr. Buckland has instructed me to hoof them out."

Julian did not reply to this piece of information. He reflected rather painfully that he was also asking for a job like one of those "reporter fellows."

The young man condescended to take his card, and returned almost immediately with further information, delivered this time in a friendly way.

"Mr. Buckland will see you in half an hour, sir. He's dictating to his lady secretaries while he has breakfast in the morning room. . . . We're fairly rushed with that Victory Bond scheme."

"What's that?" asked Julian.

The footman raised his eyebrows, and looked both astonished and shocked.

"Don't you read *The Week,* sir? We're offering Victory Bonds on the easy payment system, coupled with Life Insurance, and prizes to be drawn once a year. Great! One of Mr. Buckland's strokes of genius. We're fairly inundated with correspondence, and it's raised our circulation half a million already."

He showed Julian into the drawing-room, pulled back the window curtains a little, handed him *The Morning Post,* and left the room.

Julian ignored the paper and gazed round the room with its gilt furniture of the Empire period—rather too ornate—and its portraits of various generations of Burtons from the Stuart period onwards. It seemed rather a pity that the family had had to abandon these portraits of their

ancestors, especially a cavalier by Van Dyck—"Sir Charles Burton, Kt., Master of His Majesty's Horse, 1648." And as though to emphasise the change of ownership there was a full length portrait of Victor Buckland in a frock coat with an orchid in his buttonhole, and that "strong, silent" look which appeared week by week with the photograph (inset) in his latest powerful article. Julian read the inscription, which was interesting.

> "Presented by the Staff of *The Week*
> in recognition of the splendid patriotism,
> the noble generosity, and the unfailing
> genius of
> The Right Honourable Victor Buckland, M.P."

Julian had only just read this inscription when the drawing-room door burst open and a pretty girl with bobbed hair, dressed in a blue frock, darted in, flung herself on the sofa, buried her face in a chintz-covered cushion, and sobbed passionately.

It is needless to say that Julian felt profoundly embarrassed. Quite obviously the girl had not seen him standing under the portrait of Victor Buckland and had fled to the drawing-room believing that it was uninhabited.

Julian stared at her, coughed, and shifted his feet on the polished boards.

The girl raised her head from the cushion with a jerk, sat up straight, and then howled into a very small handkerchief which was already wet.

"Sorry!" said Julian. "What's happened?"

The girl jumped up and spoke passionately, choking down her sobs.

"I won't stand it any longer!"

"What?" asked Julian.

"To be sworn at by a wicked old man like that! All because I corrected him on a point of grammar!"

"What, 'him'?" asked Julian, for the sake of simplicity.

"The Old Man! Mr. Buckland. And I don't care who you are or if you go and tell him what I say."

"I won't tell," said Julian. "What's he been doing?"

"He's a nasty old man, and his language isn't fit for any girl's ears. I'll lose his precious three pounds ten a week rather than suffer under him a day longer. The way he goes for poor Miss Dove is perfectly scandalous!"

"Who's Miss Dove?" asked Julian.

The girl seemed surprised at his ignorance.

"His secretary, of course."

"Oh, I see. Who are you then?"

"I'm Miss Hamilton. Joan Hamilton. Junior typist. Miss Dove does all the brain work, and gets most of his bad temper! It's disgusting! . . . Well, I'm going."

She wiped her eyes again and then looked at Julian rather shyly now that her emotion had cooled down.

"Of course I ought not to talk like this before a stranger. But there *is* a limit, isn't there?"

Julian agreed that in most things there was some kind of limit.

"Are you on the staff of *The Week?*" she asked.

"No," said Julian, "but I expect to be, pretty soon. Anyhow I'm asking for it."

Miss Joan Hamilton looked at him as women look at men who are about to go on desperate adventures with deadly risks.

"Don't!" she said. "I earnestly advise you not to. The Old Man is a sink of iniquity. He ought to be suppressed by law. It's nothing but lies and slander and disgusting stuff."

"People seem to like it," said Julian.

"People!" answered Miss Joan Hamilton, with the scorn of Thomas Carlyle for a world of fools.

Julian was tempted to tell her that his father was the editor of *The Week,* but further conversation was prevented by the return of the footman who nodded to Julian and said, "The Governor's ready for you."

Then he turned to Miss Joan with an air of ironical commiseration.

"Oh, there you are, Miss! Your number's up, I'm afraid. I overheard the Governor instructing Miss Dove to give you the immediate sack. You're the third in the

past fortnight. 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here,' as we used to say in the dear old trenches."

Miss Joan Hamilton did not encourage his somewhat familiar conversation, but with a haughty glance requested him to order a cab to fetch her in half an hour.

Julian smiled a good-bye to her as he left the room. She had a lot of spirit, he thought.

When he was shown into the morning room Victor Buckland was dictating a letter to a harassed-looking lady of uncertain age with a pale face and mouse-coloured hair brushed back from a high thin forehead, who was certainly Miss Dove. A girl somewhat older than Miss Joan Hamilton was typing in a corner of the room with amazing rapidity. The proprietor of *The Week* did not take the slightest notice of Julian's entry and continued his dictation while Julian remained standing. His bulky body was deep in a big chair with one leg over its arm. On a table at his elbow were the relics of an English breakfast. A litter of papers lay on the floor by his side. His bald head caught the light from the window, and glistened as though highly greased. His big flabby face, with heavily puffed eyes behind American glasses, was turned towards Miss Dove as he dictated in a slow sonorous voice.

"It has always been the policy of *The Week* to reveal comma without fear or favour comma any scandalous secret lurking behind the scenes of English life comma in order that public morality may be defended and the sanctity of the home—er—vindicated full stop. I deeply regret that your son should have committed suicide in a moment of temporary insanity comma but *The Week* acknowledges no responsibility whatever in view of the revelations which it made in the public interest comma and any further communication you may have to make should be addressed to our solicitors, Messrs. Patterson and Prout full stop. I am, dear Madam—"

He cleared his throat huskily, dropped one more paper on to the litter below his chair, and said, "That'll do, Miss Dove. Type those out."

Miss Dove retired to a little table on the other side of

the room and typed with the same amazing rapidity as the other girl, so that the click of their typewriters made a noise like machine gun fire.

It was then that Victor Buckland turned his attention to Julian, with heavy geniality.

"Good morning, Perryam. How's your father? Take a seat, won't you?"

Julian sat down on the nearest chair, while Victor Buckland took a cigar from a case in his breast pocket, cut off the end with a little machine attached to his great bulk by a gold chain, and lit it deliberately.

"Your father tells me you want to do something for *The Week*. What's your idea?"

"Well," said Julian, carelessly, "I'm rather keen to do some literary work."

Victor Buckland smiled rather grimly.

"High brow stuff I suppose? Sonnets, academic essays in the Oxford style? Reviews of books?"

Julian acknowledged that he would prefer book reviewing to reporting.

Victor Buckland chuckled good-naturedly.

"I thought so! I've turned down scores of young fellows like you. So has your father, as I expect he's told you. They all want to review books or write dramatic criticism."

"Well," said Julian again, "I wouldn't object to do a theatre now and then."

He had visions of first night tickets. He could pass some on to Audrey and others.

"Exactly! I suppose you did a bit of writing for the *Isis?*"

"Yes. I was a regular contributor. Light stuff of course, but I made rather a hit in a way."

Old Buckland chuckled.

"The number of lives that have been wrecked by the *Isis!* That sheet ought to be suppressed. It gives fellows false ideas, cultivates the worst possible style, and makes intellectual prigs of them. I didn't get my training on the *Isis,* thank God. Nor did your father! I got it as a re-

porter of police court news, and sub-editor of the *Half-penny Budget.*"

He puffed many rings of smoke from his cigar, and looked at Julian.

"Why don't you go into business? There's nothing like trade."

"I want to write," said Julian.

Victor Buckland made a queer noise in his throat.

"There's no money in it, unless you write the right kind of stuff. Even then there's not much in it unless you get on to the management side, with shares in the business. It's a trade, like any other. But it wants more brains, more push, more nerve, and more knowledge of life. That's how I've succeeded. That's how your father has succeeded—under my direction."

Julian resented that patronising reference to his father, and felt his gorge rise at this old egoist.

"I understand Life," said Victor Buckland, gulping down some cold coffee. "I've mastered the secrets of the Human Mind. I've analysed the Average Man and the Average Woman. I know 'em inside out, and their fundamental interests for which I cater. The old law of supply and demand. They demand certain things, unconsciously—I supply them. That's why *The Week* has a circulation of two millions."

He was silent a moment, as though reflecting on the stupendous achievement of that two millions.

"Has your father told you the secret?" he asked.

"No," said Julian. "He does not talk shop much at home. We don't encourage him."

"Ah!" said the Old Man, glowering, "you're like Cyril in that way. Isn't interested! Just spends the money his father makes."

Julian condescended to encourage him a little.

"I'd like to know," he remarked.

"Oh, you would, would you?"

Victor Buckland seemed pleased with his interest.

"If you take advantage of what I tell you, there's a big fortune for you. . . . I tell all my young men, only they

don't seem to profit by it. They've no guts. They weaken. Even your father shirks the business side of things—doesn't understand the elements!—and plays the sentimentalist when I'm not looking."

"What's the secret, sir?" asked Julian.

He did not want to know very much. He had no ambition to develop into such a type as this gross old man with his puffed eyes and big paunch and flabby flesh, even if success led to a house like this with its great park. But he wanted a job on his paper, as a means of escape from Gorse Hill.

"The principles," said Victor Buckland, "are elementary. When I look back at my own career I'm astonished at the simplicity of the game, apart from any gift of organisation and that touch of genius which exalts the Commonplace."

He puffed at his big cigar thoughtfully, and stared at Julian, and through him, as though seeing the principles of Success somewhere at the end of the room.

"What are the fundamental passions, interests, and pleasures of the human race?" he asked sternly.

Julian failed to give a guess.

"The same in every country, my boy, in every class, and in every heart. . . . Love, Hate, Religion, the Sporting Instinct, and Scandal—curiosity in the affairs of other people like themselves. . . . Take Love . . ."

He seemed to take Love and ponder over it, as he might judge a horse in the paddock. He did not see the curl of Julian's lip.

"Love," he said. "People want to know about it, peer into its secret motives and instincts, study its abnormalities, its melodrama, its tremendous Urge. They want to know how the actress loves, how the Bishop loves, the film star, the murderer, the typist girl, the milliner. Well, I tell them! I give the divorce news in full—all the best cases. The Divorce Court provides the Hansard of Love; the great unending story of romance, tragedy, adventure, passionate sin, pity, revolt against the prohibitions of social custom and the restraints of civilised life. The divorce court news is the Shakespearean drama of everyday life—and some

fools want to suppress it! When I can't get a good divorce case, I send my young men out to discover private scandals, to interview leading psychologists on the burning question, to write articles on every aspect of amorous interest. 'Do girls like men with grey eyes—black eyes, brown eyes?' 'Do men like red-haired women, black-haired women, women who paint, intellectual women, stupid women, bad-tempered women?' An endless field of enquiry. Love, my dear boy, is the key-note of my success. See?"

"I see!" said Julian, and for a moment he had a frightful vision of his love for Evelyn under the searchlight of *The Week*.

"Then there's Hate," said Victor Buckland, solemnly.

"Yes," said Julian, "there certainly is Hate."

The Old Man nodded.

"Enormously important. People must have something to hate, just as they must have something to love. It's healthy and natural. Well, I give it to them."

"Good!" said Julian, with deep irony.

"Yes," said Victor Buckland. "Hot and strong. I encourage Patriotism by making them hate the enemies of their country. I did an enormous work during the war—inadequately rewarded—by keeping the home fires burning with hatred against the Hun. Now I'm showing them the hostility that lurks in the American mind against Great Britain—its envy and greed and jealousy and traditional enmity. I'm working up feeling against France, which has been pursuing a hostile policy to this country ever since the signing of peace—though I still believe in hammering the Hun. I'm doing my best to counteract the sloppy sentimentality of our internationalists, and all that League of Nations tosh. In whatever country there is some damn fool politician who inveighs against England I drag his words into the light and hit him hard. *The Week,* my boy, is the pillory of modern England, and in every number I nail somebody's ear to the post and encourage the healthy old instinct which used to incite our forefathers to throw dead cats and sharp flints at traitors, heretics, thieves, prostitutes, and evil doers of all kinds."

"A bit dangerous, isn't it?" asked Julian. "I should have thought we had enough hate already without encouragement."

The Old Man waved his cigar and glowered angrily.

"You think wrong. It needs encouragement. You can't have Love without Hate. You can't be healthy without hate. You can't be righteous without Hate."

He was silent for a moment and then said, with an air of finality, and as a solemn profession of faith:

"I believe in Hate."

Julian also believed in Hate at the moment. He hated this detestable old man, with a sense of loathing.

"Then there's Religion," said Victor Buckland.

He spoke solemnly and put his fat fingers together as though in silent prayer.

"I'm all for it," he asserted grimly. "Thank God I have religious instincts of my own. I'm conscious of having been Protected in this work of mine, which has not been without grave financial risks and certain financial dangers. . . . However, leaving that on one side . . . everybody's interested in Religion. That's why I've been devoting a good deal of space lately to spiritualism, automatic writing, faith cures, and so forth. It's most important as a means of circulation. Also, I don't mind telling you, that I believe in fairies."

Julian was startled by that announcement. Victor Buckland was the last man on earth, he thought, to have any faith in fairies. But for a moment or two he seemed to be staring at them through the rings of his cigar smoke.

"Then there's Sport," said the Old Man. "That's the gambling spirit instinctive in the human heart. The office-boy likes a 'bob' on the three-thirty just as much as I like a 'pony.' Why not? The country clergyman, the maiden aunt, the retired colonel, take an option on something in the market on the chance of getting big profits. A little flutter! Why not? It gives a spice to the monotony of everyday life. Everybody likes a Castle in Spain. The dream, the hope, the vision of sudden wealth, dropping from the sky, as it were, is at the basis of all fairy tales.

Cinderella meets the Prince! Aladdin finds the magic lamp! Nowadays the lottery, the option, the newspaper competition, provides that element of Luck without which life is stale. *The Week* offers the biggest prizes, the greatest competitions, the finest sporting tips, and the most startling financial news. I stimulate the sporting spirit of our fine old English character. As a Patriot I'm the patron of all Sport from horse-racing to ping-pong."

Julian studied the figure of the great sportsman. He did not look as if he had ever played a game in his life. His heavy body and hunched shoulders had an unhealthy look.

"Finally there's Scandal."

The Old Man smiled for the first time in his monologue.

"Some people don't like the word," he said. "Well, call it curiosity about Life—the Quest of Truth. That's what it means. Why was Lord Blank seen at Brighton last Saturday with the beautiful Miss X of the Winter Garden? Why does the Right Honourable So-and-So, one of His Majesty's Privy Councillors, pay five pounds a week to a little dressmaker in the Fulham Road? Why, indeed? We'd like to know! If there's any evil in it, let's drag it out. Let's hunt out the hypocrite. Let's expose the shams and humbugs of the world. Also let us interest our readers! My dear Perryam, critics occasionally say hard things about *The Week*. Highbrow papers with infinitesimal circulations, subsidised by cranks, accuse us of pandering to what is base in English character. On the contrary! We're on the side of the angels. We take our stand on Morality, Religion, Patriotism, Love and Truth."

He spoke those words with a kind of solemn reverence. It was obvious that he was moved by the thought of his noble mission in life. Julian had an irresistible desire to laugh aloud, but he controlled himself by an effort of will power. He could not accuse the Old Man of complete hypocrisy. It was probable that he really believed that he was serving a divine purpose in his weekly newspaper, just as Napoleon and other great scoundrels deluded themselves into the belief that they were inspired and protected by God's Will. Perhaps also there was some sound basis for

his claim to provide the great public with the knowledge they most wanted. *The Week,* with all its faults, *was* a mirror of English life not better and not worse than the average morality, the general intelligence of the great crowd. The fellows who wrote for it must have an extraordinary knowledge of all that drama of life—squalid and vile perhaps but amusing and dynamic and real—from which Julian had always been sheltered. If he aspired to literature, he must get a look at life. With his father as Editor —poor old Dad!—he could do pretty much as he liked, and anyhow chuck it if he hated it too much.

"Is there any small job I could do for you," he asked, "as one of your junior truth-tellers?"

Victor Buckland did not seem to notice his slight touch of irony.

"On principle," he answered, "I object to an Editor bringing in his sons. It's not good for the discipline of the office. And your father is weak enough already. Hates to sack a man! He's timid of his own staff! Too damned good-natured!"

He stared at Julian as though measuring him up.

"You might be useful on our West End staff. I daresay Burton—that's the news editor—could do with a well dressed young fellow like you to go round the town and help with the social gossip. Payment on results, and a month's trial. I'll tell your father."

"Many thanks," said Julian.

The Old Man called out to Miss Dove who was still typing furiously at the end of the long room.

"Take down this note."

It was a note to Horace Burton instructing him to give Mr. Julian Perryam a month's trial as a writer of social notes and general reporter.

There was a postscript which Julian did not understand, and it gave him a vague sense of alarm.

"Put him onto the dope stunt."

Victor Buckland rose from his chair, flung the stump of his cigar into the fire, and held out his big flabby hand to Julian.

"Well, there you are. . . . For your father's sake! Start in on Monday. And remember what I told you. . . . I don't suppose you'll make a journalist. You're too supercilious. . . . You'll have to get rid of that Oxford manner."

Julian left the room, nodded to the young footman in the hall, and motored home with the result of his interview. He was not elated, but secretly a little excited. It was his start in life. It was also, alas, a self-imposed exile from the neighbourhood of Evelyn Iffield. To his father that night he expressed his loathing of old Buckland.

"He ought to be put in a lethal chamber," he said. "How you've managed to work for him all this time is past imagination."

Mr. Perryam agreed, with some qualification.

"You can't tell me anything about that, Julian! . . . But he's generous to those who serve him. And the queer thing is that underneath all his blackguardism there's a strain of sentiment."

"He's a horror!" said Julian.

"Well, you won't see much of him. I have to put up with that. It's my Cross, old man." He sighed deeply, but then cheered up and said, "Well, I can keep an eye on you. That's a comfort. I won't let that fellow Burton grind you too hard. He's a tough customer."

XXVI

A LETTER from Stokes Prichard who, next to Clatworthy, had been Julian's best friend at Oxford—in spite of frequent quarrels—solved the difficulty of finding rooms in London. Prichard, like Clatworthy, Burnaby and others, had come down from Oxford, with or without a degree—Prichard had just scraped through to his B.A.—after a glorious summer term only spoilt by Eights Week and the usual invasion of college quads, the Clarendon, and the Randolph, by fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, and other elderly people who drew doleful comparisons with the past, regretted the decadence of modern youth, and wondered whether it had been really worth while sending their sons to Oxford. Prichard was to be articled to a solicitor—"Pegasus in harness, old boy!"—and as the son of north country parents had taken lodgings in London, in the neighbourhood of the Savoy Hotel, where he hoped to sample the cocktails occasionally. That is to say, in York Street, Adelphi. His mother, dear soul, was anxious about him. She hated the idea of his being alone in London, as an innocent prey to all its ravening wolves. She would feel comforted if he shared rooms with a nice serious young man. Stokes Prichard's thoughts had immediately leapt towards Julian. They had shared rooms together at Oxford. They had got used to each other's little habits, Julian's size in collars was the same as Prichard's—always useful when one had to dress in a hurry—would he care to share those rooms in the Adelphi, halve expenses, and face temptation together? Reply desired by return of post.

"It seems just the thing," said Mrs. Perryam.

"What sort of a boy is he?" asked Janet.

When Julian said that Stokes Prichard was marvellously good looking, Janet approved of the proposed arrangement without desiring further credentials. Mr. Perryam agreed to the terms, which were fairly reasonable, though more

than he wanted to pay unless Julian made some contribution to his own expenses.

"Well, I expect he'll earn a bit," said Mrs. Perryam, hopefully. "Journalists have gone up in the world since our early days in Brixton. If you had played your cards well, Daddy, you ought to have been a knight or a baronet by now. I expect Julian will be a Duke one day!"

This brightness of speech was a glittering camouflage hiding a sense of sadness which made Julian suspect her of secret tears. It was a blow to her that he should be leaving home.

"The next one to go will be Janet," she said in a moment of self-revelation. "The little beast won't be happy till she's married—I only hope she's happy then!—and presently your father and I will be left moping together in this large house. A nice prospect for premature old age!"

"Why not chuck up Gorse Hill and take a house in Town?" suggested Julian. "Then we could all be together again, more or less."

His mother brightened up a little.

"Well, there's something in that! And it's not the first time I've thought of it. But a house in Town is as lonely as a house in the country when the young birds fly away. That's life. Funny old thing, isn't it? Can't see much use in it, after a certain age!"

She repented of those words, and put her hand on his shoulder.

"That's how my tongue runs away with me! As if I shouldn't be happy in watching you and Janet climbing the ladder! Only when you're rich and famous don't get ashamed of your poor old mother!"

"No chance of that!" said Julian. "You'll always give us a lead, mater. As for ladder climbing, there's no stopping you. One rung after another, and all the aristocracy feeding out of your hand, like tame beasts."

"Yes, I know you think I'm a snob!" said Mrs. Perryam, pulling his hair in her playful way. "But if it hadn't been for my push you'd all have been living in the Brixton Road, which your father regrets in his morbid moments."

She declared her intention of coming up to Town at least once a week, and breaking into his rooms, however many pretty ladies he might be entertaining to tea.

"Same here," said Janet, who overheard her remark. "I shall use Julian's rooms as a *pied à terre* when I lose the last train home. Most convenient!"

"And I suppose Stokes Prichard will be asked to sleep on the sofa?" suggested Julian.

"Why not?" asked Janet. "I'm sure he'll be glad to lend me his bed."

"Hie thee to a nunnery!" said Julian.

So they mocked at each other, though beneath this playfulness was the thought in each mind that in some way Julian's departure was the beginning of that break up of home ties which is one of life's little ironies. The break had begun in war time when Jack went away, not to return. Perhaps it was this memory which made Mrs. Perryam cling to Julian, as the night before his going she put her arms about him and wept for a moment with her head on his shoulder, ahd then accused herself of being a silly damn fool and perfectly idiotic.

Julian's grandfather was distressed also, and although Julian had cursed him secretly at times as a thorough-going nuisance, he was patient now when the old man came into his bedroom and thrust an envelope into his hand.

"There's a cheque inside for fifty pounds," he whispered. "Don't waste it on riotous living, my boy! Keep it for a rainy day. It's useful to have a little nest-egg."

He patted Julian on the shoulder.

"Be a good boy. Keep clear of the women folk. They always play the devil. I told you about that little girl in a hat shop at Tooting? It was a terrible warning to me. The very pits of Hell yawned in front of my erring feet. Your grandmother saved me in the nick of time when she made me join her Bible class. . . .

"This journalism," he said, "I'm not in favour of it. I'm afraid it's hard to keep honest and write for the papers. Your father has scraped through somehow, thanks to my upbringing. Sensation at any price. A ceaseless record of

immorality and crime. I'll be surprised if you don't lose your soul."

He took Julian's hand and fondled it.

"Why, it seems only yesterday that I had you on my knee, telling you about Puss in Boots! You had golden hair then, all curls, and I was afraid of your innocent eyes looking into my wicked old face and asking all sorts of strange questions, as if I knew everything about God and life, and the way things worked. And me such an ignorant old fellow!"

"Full of wisdom, Grandad," said Julian.

His grandfather shook his head.

"Very ignorant, my dear. We're all ignorant, though we pretend to be wise. Soon I'll know more. I shall be going into the Great Light where all things are known. Queer, isn't it? When I've shaken off this old husk I'll know more than if I'd been to Oxford like you. Perhaps I'll be able to help you down here. If love can break through I shall keep in touch with you. That's a pleasant thought!"

"Why, Grandfather," said Julian, rather moved for once, "you're a youngster yet. What's seventy-two?"

"That's true," said the old man. "My dear father was eighty-five before he passed over. Still, I'm getting on. Anyhow, Julian, I'm past the dangerous age of youth; so full of risk, so proud, so ignorant of pitfalls, so passionate, so impatient of advice. Your father wouldn't listen to a word from me! Now you don't listen to a word from your father. So it goes on from age to age, from folly to folly, and from wickedness to wickedness. No one learns from past experience."

"We have to face our own," said Julian, yawning. "Good night, Grandad! Time you went to bed."

"Yes," said the old man. "And I'm an old fool to waste my breath."

But he raised his hand solemnly at the door and said:

"May God bless you and take care of you."

On that last night at home Mrs. Perryam and Janet were both rather "blue," and Mr. Perryam adopted a hearty cheeriness so obviously false that it was worse than gloom.

When Julian went into his study after dinner Mr. Perryam took a wine bottle out of a cupboard and said, "I think this is an occasion for the oldest and crustiest."

He poured out two glasses of port with a nervous hand.

"I'm glad you're beginning work, old boy," he said. "You'll feel happier. Fleet Street is a rough road but I'd like to be tramping it again with the chance of youth, as once on thirty bob a week. Here's to the Street of Adventure, despite all its ups and downs, and all its villainies!"

He raised his glass to Julian.

"Here's luck," said Julian, without emotion.

Father and son looked into each other's eyes, with a smile, shy of each other.

"Come home whenever you can," said Mr. Perryam. "Most week-ends. I shan't see much of you at the office, and your mother will pine without you."

He said nothing about his own desire for Julian's company, but it was unnecessary.

"Janet's a handful," he said presently. "She scares me stiff with her reckless ways and audacious speech."

"She's all right," said Julian. "Wants a little taming, that's all."

Mr. Perryam laughed, but ended with a little groan.

"I'd hate to see her tamed! . . . Life's so cruel sometimes in that way. And my little Janet is alarmingly beautiful."

"Prettyish—not beautiful," said Julian, with a brother's coldness of vision. "Nothing like the mater."

"Why," said Mr. Perryam, rather emotionally, "I'm glad to hear you say that, Julian, even at Janet's expense! I like to know you think your mother *is* beautiful."

Later, when they left the room, Mr. Perryam put his hand on Julian's arm.

"They'll miss you to-morrow, old boy," he said in a voice that pretended to be casual and untroubled.

It was a feeble pretence.

XXVII

STOKES PRICHARD was already installed in his rooms in York Street, Adelphi, when Julian arrived with five suit cases and a trunk. He greeted Julian with prolonged laughter, not because he regarded his friend as a ridiculous object, but because, as he explained, it was extraordinarily comic to find themselves together again as in the old days when they shared rooms in the Turl at Oxford, and when Julian resented being awakened from his morning slumber by blithesome song.

"A habit," said Julian, "which I hope you have abandoned with advancing age?"

As a proof that no such change had crept over his sunny spirit, Stokes Prichard immediately burst into a ballad in which he announced his intention to get wed in the summer time, to get wed in July, to get wed when the roses are red, and the weather is lovely and dry.

It was obvious at a first glance that Julian's future life with Stokes Prichard would be led to a musical accompaniment. An elaborate gramophone in fumed oak stood in one corner of the room and a little rosewood piano shared the wall space opposite the window with a bookshelf in which Prichard had arranged his favourite authors, including many small volumes of Georgian poetry. The walls of the long low room, which was their only sitting-room, were panelled in oak, painted white, with a window seat covered with flowered chintz, and there were two bedrooms furnished in what Prichard called a "chaste style," with oak bedsteads, two rush-bottomed chairs, and a marble-topped wash-stand. Some Medici prints gave an air of artistic elegance to the walls, and the mantelpiece was already crowded with photographs of girls who had been dazzled by the glint of Prichard's crinkly gold hair.

"Pretty snug as an antechamber to Life," said that young

man, regarding the sitting room with an air of joyous satisfaction. He went to the windows and opened them wide so that the room was filled with the dull roar of traffic down the Strand and the honk-honk of innumerable taxis.

"The music of the London streets!" said Prichard, with a look of ecstasy. "The call to humanity. Oh, life, oh, love, oh, youth! What fate awaits us in this jolly old city of sin and pleasure? How are we going to shape our young souls in this melting pot of passionate adventure? In what way are we going to attune ourselves to the rhythm and melody of this mighty instrument called London life? Briefly and immediately, where shall we feed this evening?"

They fed, naturally and inevitably, in a Soho restaurant, the same in which Evelyn Iffield had been wild in her gaiety, and chatty with the old French waiter,—a memory which made Julian so pensive and *distrait* that Stokes Prichard immediately suspected him of sentimental reminiscence and was confirmed by Julian's guilty and embarrassed look.

Julian felt old and cynical compared with the good looking fellow opposite him, who gazed round the room with delighted eyes and caught the admiring glances of little actress girls, and middle-aged women of uncertain class dining with foreigners and Jews, and business men giving a treat to suburban wives. Stokes Prichard was utterly untouched by the tragedy of life, and eager for its adventure, which held no terror for him. Julian had already been wounded by its cruelty and put into the solitary confinement of his own soul by its penal laws. He could feel in his jacket pocket the crinkle of a piece of paper which was his *lettre de cachet* as it used to be called in the old days when French aristocrats—like young Mirabeau—were sent to the Bastille for offences against the social code. It was a letter from Evelyn.

"I'm glad you're going away [she had written]. The situation has become rather strained in my old ghost house with Ted and the mother-in-law. And everybody spies on us here, I find. Besides, dear Julian, I don't want to wreck your young life by tempting you to illicit love, or fanning your pure young passion by my wicked wiles. If you're very good and reasonable we might meet in town

now and again. I have utterly refused to be carried off to Italy if the mother-in-law is one of the party. In any case, however, you must realise that there can only be friendship between us. I want you to be sensible about that and not spoil things by romantic adventure for a lady old enough in experience of life to be your great-grandmamma, but young enough in years and spirit to be your very good and loving comrade

"EVELYN."

This letter had opened his wound again. How was it possible to be "sensible" when the very scent of her letter made him yearn for her? "There can only be friendship between us." These words were his *lettre de cachet,* his condemnation to eternal loneliness. And there was Stokes Prichard, with his crinkly hair and his laughing eyes, searching around for amorous adventure and expecting to find life a bed of roses without a thorn!

They walked to Piccadilly after dinner, and Stokes Prichard—who belonged to a North Country family in a remote part of Lancashire and was unfamiliar with London except in a brief dash now and then from Oxford—was thrilled by the noise, the lights, the crowd, and seemed intoxicated by the sense of life about him. It was an evening in June, and at nine o'clock the sky was still flushed with red and a golden haze filled the streets, while purple shadows lay beneath the trees. The air was very still and warm, and heavy with the scent of passing women, and the smell of petrol, parched grass in the Green Park, and sun-baked tar on the roads. The nostrils of Stokes Prichard quivered at this symphony of London smells. He seemed to be walking on air, possessed by some mystical or sensuous enchantment in this London night. They walked up Piccadilly towards Hyde Park Corner, on the park side, and looked through the railings into the green dusk there, where drab couples sat close together under the leafy trees or lay on the yellowing grass.

"The enchanted wood!" said Stokes Prichard. "Those lovers are a million miles away from this world on the other side of the railings. They're in Arcady, or the Forest of Arden, utterly alone with romance under that twinkling

star. City clerks and shop girls—they don't care a damn for the policeman pacing up that path, or for anything happening beyond the railings, in the way of Industrial Unrest, German Revolutions, Bolshevism, Starving Russia, Liberal Reunion, and all the things that one fails to read in the newspapers. How utterly unimportant they are to the individual egoist, looking into the liquid eyes of a pretty girl!"

"Aren't we rather like that ourselves?" asked Julian.

"Looking into liquid eyes?" asked Stokes Prichard. "No such luck, old dear!"

"No, I mean ignoring the big things beyond the railings, thinking they don't matter to our private lives, and won't break through."

Stokes Prichard laughed carelessly.

"Nothing matters if one doesn't let it. Especially if one looks into liquid eyes. But, oh, the loneliness of Stokes Prichard in a world of fair women! To think of all the beautiful creatures in this great city and I am unknown to them, and they to me!"

As a matter of fact, he found himself looking into liquid eyes before they reached Hyde Park Corner. They belonged to a neatly dressed girl who came walking slowly towards Piccadilly, and after a glance at Stokes Prichard, deliberately dropped a little hand bag as she passed. Prichard stooped quickly, picked it up, raised his hat, and said in his most gallant way, "Your bag, I believe?"

"Oh, how careless of me!" said the girl. "Thank you so much. And haven't I seen you before somewhere?"

"Very likely," said Prichard. "I'm always about with myself. Which way are you walking, Miss—?"

"Miss Marjoribanks," said the girl. "Known as Lottie."

She giggled, and looked enticingly at Stokes Prichard, and then glanced towards Julian, and asked, "Who's your friend?"

"Lord Aubrey de Vere," said Stokes Prichard, "one of our ancient aristocracy, and a most exalted soul."

"Glad to know you, Aubrey," said the girl. "Well, what shall we do?"

"Suggest something," said Stokes Prichard, ignoring Julian's angry nudge.

"What about a drink at the American Bar?"

"Charming idea," said Stokes Prichard.

"No," said Julian. "Not to-night."

He turned to the girl, and spoke in a firm but friendly way.

"Frightfully sorry, but my friend has forgotten an engagement we made. There is no getting out of it."

"Rats!" said the girl. "Go away, spoil-sport! You're no more a Lord than I'm Miss Marjoribanks."

"That's true," said Julian, "but I'm not going without my friend."

Stokes Prichard was astounded and distressed.

"Hang it all, old lad—"

"That's all right," said Julian. "You're not going to leave me in the lurch, are you—on our first night together? If so, you and I break up partnership."

There was something in the tone of his voice, in his serious look, which impressed Prichard.

"Sorry," he said to the girl, "I quite forgot that little engagement."

"Oh, don't be a silly rotter!" said the girl. "Let your woebegone friend go and drown himself. You and I can go and have some fun."

"Coming, Prichard?" asked Julian. He strode away from where Stokes Prichard stood talking to the girl, hesitating between desire for adventure, and loyalty to friendship. A few moments later Prichard rejoined him, sulkily.

"Rather priggish that, wasn't it?" he asked in an aggrieved voice.

"No," said Julian. "There's not much of the prig about me. But if you want to get amorous with some one, let me introduce you to a decent girl."

"Well, there's something to that," said Prichard, slightly less ruffled. "But for Heaven's sake, old man, don't go thwarting my sense of adventure. That little girl was quite alluring, and a perfect lady."

Julian jeered at him.

"If you think that, you're younger than I thought you were, after three years at Oxford."

Stokes Prichard was abashed but annoyed.

"I don't care a damn if she wasn't," he remarked presently, as they walked up to Knightsbridge. "I'm a student of life without class distinctions."

"I'm a snob," said Julian, "as far as women are concerned. If you *are* asking for trouble, Prichard—and you're sure to get it—keep to ladies of your own caste."

"In the words of the Perfect Lady," said Prichard, making a jest at his own expense, "Rats!"

Further argument was prevented by a sudden apparition in the portals of the Hyde Park Hotel between the geraniums. Stokes Prichard beheld it with amazement and delight.

"Well, I'm damned!" he exclaimed. "There's little old Tarzan!"

Clatworthy, splendid in evening clothes, under an opera hat rather too big for his head so that it rested gracefully on his ears, was obviously waiting for a lady, and smoking a cigarette while he waited.

He responded to Prichard's shout of greeting with a friendly wave of the hand behind the right ear, and then caught sight of Julian and repeated the signal behind his left ear.

"Hulloh, you two! Looking for trouble in this overrated city?"

"Looking for a lady," said Stokes Prichard. "Only Perryam is so particular!"

"Well, if you want to see beauty and rank in their noblest aspect, wait till you see my Aunt, when she's finished rouging her withered old cheeks."

The Countess of Longhurst appeared at this moment, escorted by the hall porter with some ceremony. She was arrayed in a yellow silk cut low so that her skinny old chest was exposed, and the rays from the street lamps glittered in her diamond collar. An ermine cloak hung from her shoulders and gave her a somewhat regal look.

"Who are those young Bolsheviks?" she asked Clatworthy,

with her lorgnette raised to regard Julian and Prichard.

"Comrades Lenin and Trotsky," said Clatworthy.

But the old lady recognised Julian, and tapped him on the cheek.

"You're young Perryam! How's that pretty mother of yours?"

Without waiting for an answer, she turned to her nephew again.

"Well, you've been a very good boy to your ugly old aunt. I enjoyed that dinner, and your nonsense talk. Now you can run away and play with your friends, while I go home to bed and say a prayer or two to keep you from the devil, and save England from Ramsay Macdonald and all those damn traitors who are conspiring to ruin this poor old country."

"That's right, Aunt!" said Clatworthy. "You go and ask God to bless the dear old Die-hards who, like Charles II. of blessèd memory, are an unconscionable time a-dying."

"Take me to the carriage, and stop talking bosh," said the Countess of Longhurst.

Clatworthy gave her his arm, and having stowed the old lady into her closed brougham, winked ironically at Julian.

She held her hand through the window for Julian to shake.

"Time was," she said, "when young men knew how to behave with elegance and respect. Now you boys have no manners at all. No morals either—but I daresay that was the same in my young days only we weren't supposed to know. Well, tell that fool in front to drive home. What's he waiting for? Good night, Johnny, and don't go and get drunk, or lead these young fellows into immorality."

"Remarkable old woman!" said Clatworthy, when the brougham departed. "She's a survival from the Eighteenth Century, hard as steel, ugly as sin, doesn't wash behind the ears, but lots of spirit, and a stern sense of duty,—which I've inherited!"

He grinned at Julian and said, "Where shall we spend a happy evening?"

After some consultation it was decided to go back to the rooms in York Street, Adelphi, where they could yarn to their hearts' content and drink some of Prichard's whiskey. They would have lots to talk about. They were all beginning life together. Their accumulated talent, thought Clatworthy, would undoubtedly make things move. As far as he was concerned his destiny was already clear. He had been given a job in the Foreign Office and was plainly marked out to be Ambassador in Paris before many years had passed. Meanwhile he was doing office boy's work to a man who specialised in the economic conditions of Czecho-Slovakia.

"Where is that?" asked Stokes Prichard, blandly. "I seem to have heard of it."

"I tried to turn it up on the map the other day," said Clatworthy, "but I had no luck. I rather fancy it's an imaginary state created in an exuberant mood by Lloyd George at the Treaty of Versailles. We go on pretending it exists, for fear of letting the old man down."

It was cosy and pleasant in the rooms in York Street with the electric light turned on and the windows open with that noise of London below. They talked of Oxford, Julian's plunge into journalism, Stokes Prichard's apprenticeship to law, the best places to dine in London, the most amusing "shows," the brightest dancing clubs.

Clatworthy made a break, when, in a pause between tides of talk, he asked Julian if he had seen much of the beautiful and dangerous Mrs. Iffield.

"Not much," said Julian, sharply.

"Ah," said Clatworthy, "discretion is the better part of valour, with a girl like that. Especially when she has a large-sized husband."

"Don't talk rot!" said Julian, so fiercely that Clatworthy was instantly aware that he had "dropped a brick," and with unaccustomed tact changed the topic.

"Give us a bit of the latest rag," he said to Stokes Prichard, who played anything he had heard once with unfailing similitude and brilliant vamping.

Prichard played the "Kitten on the Keys," almost as well

as Melville Gideon, and Clatworthy was inspired to his monkey tricks, and was a playful anthropoid on the window seat, so that even Julian forgot his broken heart for a while, and laughed till the tears came into his eyes. Stokes Prichard excelled himself at the piano, and presently he and Clatworthy burst forth into song and, to a loud and majestic accompaniment, rendered the moving ballad of "Camden Town, My Camden Town!"

It was at the end of the second verse of this London lyric—"Night time in the Flats, with the stars above"—that the door opened violently and an elderly man of remarkable appearance entered without invitation. He was in his pyjamas, with bedroom slippers on bare feet, and an old dressing-gown of brown cloth girdled loosely around the waist. He had a high forehead, gaunt cheeks, a white beard and moustache, and very bright, humorous eyes; and he bore an astonishing resemblance to the picture of Don Quixote by Gustav Doré.

For a moment only Julian saw him, the other two continuing their solemn and lugubrious chant, until a change in the atmosphere, due to the open door, attracted Prichard's attention. He turned his head, slurred his notes, and looked transfixed with surprise. Clatworthy also ceased singing and regarded the uninvited guest with haughty astonishment.

"For God's sake," said the stranger, with a kind of passionate quietude, "how do you think I can do my writing with this racket on the floor below? How can I save the world from its folly when youth persists in playing the fool —at half past midnight?"

Clatworthy was the first to recover self-possession.

"Pardon me," he said politely. "Is it really necessary that you should save the world from folly? Is it indeed possible, sir, or even advisable?"

The elderly stranger regarded him severely, but with a momentary glint of humour in his steely eyes.

"Young man," he said, "I don't care to bandy words with you at this time of night. I merely ask you to desist from

inflicting torture on a sensitive brain by this unholy and unmelodious noise."

It was Stokes Prichard who felt challenged by those last words.

"Not unmelodious," he said. "A primitive theme, simply expressed, somewhat *banale* in its rhythm, but not unmelodious. Perhaps, sir, you have no ear for music?"

"You young gentlemen are, undoubtedly, from Oxford," answered the stranger. "As an old Christ Church man I recognise, as from afar, that insolent accent, that cold arrogance of ignorant minds disguised under smiling courtesy, that entrenched conceit which has been the strength of the English caste system now broken and doomed by the advance of democracy. You, if I may say so, are probably the last representatives of that peculiarly offensive attitude of mind known as the Oxford manner."

"This," said Clatworthy, with a wink at Julian, "is extremely interesting. May we beg of you to close the door—it's rather draughty—and expound to us further the thesis which you have so pleasantly laid down?"

The stranger laughed quietly in his beard.

"Look here," he said, dropping his stilted language, "I don't want to spoil sport, but I do want to get on with a bit of work. I'm a writing man. You may have read about me in some low rag or other. I'm Henry Caffyn."

"Good Heavens!" said Stokes Prichard in a voice of awe, as though beholding an archangel.

"Great Jupiter!" said Clatworthy.

"Good Lord!" said Julian.

"Well, you seem to know me," said the elderly man. His eyes twinkled with internal amusement. "I'm surprised that my infamy has travelled as far as Oxford."

It had travelled further than Oxford. All over the world for twenty years past, the essays, poems, and newspaper articles of Henry Caffyn had been the intellectual food of minds not too conventional to be shocked by his scathing satire, not too solemn to miss his Puck-like humour, not too ignorant to appreciate his immense range of scholarship,

and not too conservative to hate his radical temperament, his attacks on the snob mind, his defence of liberty, his love of the under dog—as many hated him and feared him.

"Do sit down and talk to us," said Julian. "We're frightfully sorry to have disturbed your work."

"Good Heavens, yes!" said Clatworthy. "It's like barging in where angels fear to flutter."

"That's all right," said Henry Caffyn. "Any time up to midnight. And if you'll let me join you sometimes, and smoke a pipe—"

"Any old time," said Stokes Prichard.

Henry Caffyn looked from face to face.

"I'm a dull old fogey," he said, "but I like fellows of your age. I want to save you, if I can. I want to teach you to save yourselves. You don't seem much inclined that way."

"From what particular danger?" asked Clatworthy. "Socialism, Bolshevism, Fascicism, Winston Churchill, Lord Curzon, Wine, Women, or Prohibition?"

Henry Caffyn smiled, and put a hand on his shoulder.

"I won't freeze your young blood at this midnight hour. All I can say is that if you boys don't begin to get busy, the Old Men of the Mountains are going to make a horrible mess of things again. I can see it coming. Europe is a mass of molten lava under a thin crust of make-believe. Take care you don't pop in, all of you. Well, good night, and thanks for your kind patience with my impertinent intrusion."

He tied the cord tighter round his waist, thrust his fingers through his white beard, and strode out of the room, closing the door behind him.

"Strike me pink, indigo, and ultramarine!" said Clatworthy. "Who would have thought that old rasper was Henry Caffyn! The idol of my youth, a blasphemer and heretic to my sacred Aunt, the arch-enemy of all my Die-hard relatives!"

"I always thought him a humourist," was Prichard's first remark. "To-night he spoke like Job uttering one of his less cheerful prophecies."

"Yes," said Julian, "he's one of those old birds who look

to 'Youth' to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. Good Heavens! How I hate that word 'Youth'!"

Clatworthy sucked at his empty pipe, in a reflective mood.

"Look here, 'chaps,' as the townees say, joking apart and all that, don't you think we'd better try and find out what's going on in this ridiculous old world? I mean before something gets up and hits us. So far I've restricted my newspaper reading to the sporting page and the brighter divorce news. But an occasional head-line has caught my eye now and then. I fancy we'd better begin to sit up and take notice. There's a fellow in the Foreign Office—"

He broke off his sentence and was silent.

"Well?" asked Julian.

"Well, I won't repeat things out of school, so to speak. But the gist of his remarks amounted to the gentle warning that a particularly unpleasant form of Hell is boiling up in Central Europe, while elderly statesmen are carelessly throwing lighted matches about in the neighbourhood of powder magazines. In other words, playing with fire, like silly kids. At the same time various devils in the underworld are stoking the fires for all they're worth and looking forward cheerfully to the Big Bang."

The three friends were silent for some time.

"If it comes, it comes," said Julian. "I don't see what *we* can do."

"It's pretty snug in this room, anyhow," said Stokes Prichard. "Thank God for that, and the rafters look fairly strong!"

This remark was greeted with jeers and laughter, and after further comments on the personality of Henry Caffyn, Clatworthy announced his intention of sleeping on the sofa, which he did, in a pair of Julian's pyjamas.

XXVIII

THE offices of *The Week* were not enormously far from York Street, Adelphi, that is to say, on the north side of Fleet Street, up a side turning—a great block of buildings with a frontage of granite pillars and plate glass windows on which the name of the paper was emblazoned in gigantic gilt letters with the watchword of "England, God, and Truth," and the claim that "*The Week* has the Largest Circulation of Any Weekly Paper in the World." On each side of the doorway in frames of fumed oak were the posters of the current number. On the left-hand side was a portrait of Victor Buckland with the title of his latest article:

"America Jeers at John Bull."

On the right hand side was a portrait of a plump lady in bathing dress with the title—

"Who Would Like to Meet Her in the Sea?"

Julian decided that he would not like to meet her in the sea, wondered why God came second in the motto of "England, God, and Truth," and plunged through a brass-bound door, into a spacious hall which was obviously the central office for enquiries, advertisements, and book-keeping. Rows of clerks, among whom were several girls with fluffy hair, were busy behind mahogany counters, several seedy-looking men in bowler hats which needed brushing were studying the files of the paper, and a line of people, mostly women, were standing in queue in front of a glass window on which was the word "Advertisements."

Julian extracted a visiting card from his waistcoat pocket, handed it to a Commissionaire who looked like an Admiral of the Fleet, and said he desired to see Mr. Horace Burton, the news editor.

"Very likely," said the Commissionaire. "But will he see *you,* that's the question? Never sees no one, unless by appointment."

"That's all right," said Julian, haughtily. "I'm the Editor's son, and a new member of the staff."

The Commissionaire looked less like an Admiral, for a moment.

"Oh, well," he said, "why didn't you tell me before? You've only got to walk up. Room Number 30. Mr. Burton's office boy will put you through."

Mr. Burton's office boy was even more hostile to the idea of seeing Mr. Burton. He was an anæmic youth, absorbed in a story by Ethel M. Dell, from which he dragged himself unwillingly.

"Mr. Burton? . . . Engaged."

"I've an appointment," said Julian.

"They all say that. Got it in writing?"

The same question had been put to Julian by old Buckland's footman. This time his Balliol pride resented it.

"I'll knock your damned little head off if you don't take my word," he said.

This threat did not make the youth quail. On the contrary, his upper lip curled offensively.

"That cave-man stuff don't work in this office," he answered. "We've a staff of chuckers-out on the premises. You'd best be careful, young fellow."

Fortunately an inner door opened, and a girl came out with a bundle of letters.

"Pardon me," said Julian, politely, "would you be good enough to tell Mr. Burton that I've an appointment with him. I'm Mr. Perryam's son."

The girl laughed, and turned to the office boy.

"Take this gentleman's card in, Smith, or you'll get the sack before you can say Jack Robinson."

"Yes," said the boy, "and the last boy got the sack for handing in a card from a professional pugilist with a grudge against *The Week*. Said he had an appointment. They all say so. Then I gets the blame! It isn't justice."

He took the card sulkily, returned in a moment, and said, "He'll see you."

Julian found himself face to face with Mr. Horace Burton in the inner room. He was a man of about thirty-five,

clean-shaven, with a haggard look, evasive eyes, and unfriendly smile.

"So you're the Editor's son!" he said. "Take a seat. . . . Your father told me you were coming along."

"Yes," said Julian, taking a seat.

Mr. Horace Burton tapped a tune on his table with the end of his penholder, and gave a fleeting glance at Julian.

"Oxford, aren't you?" he said.

Julian nodded.

"I came down. Rather fed up with it."

The news editor seemed to find that remark amusing.

"This won't be so pleasant," he said. "I was telling your father— However, it's none of my business."

"I'm prepared to find it unpleasant," said Julian. "Most work is, I'm told."

Mr. Horace Burton's thin lips twisted into a painful smile.

"This work, anyhow," he said, with a hint of bitterness.

He sat silent for what seemed to Julian like a long time, once letting his evasive eyes rest for a moment on Julian's well-cut clothes.

"Your father tells me the Old Man has sent you on the news side," he said presently. "As a matter of fact I had a note from the Old Man himself."

He flicked a bit of paper on his desk with the end of his penholder.

"Yes," said Julian. "That's why I've come."

It did not appear to him that his father's news editor welcomed his coming with overwhelming enthusiasm.

"Do you know anything?" asked Mr. Burton.

Julian countered that dangerous enquiry by another question.

"In what way?"

"In any way. . . . Do you know any actresses?"

"Not yet," said Julian, hopefully.

"Anything about sporting life?"

"A little about sport," said Julian.

"Any bookmakers, trainers, jockeys, racing men?"

"Not one. Rather a tough crowd, aren't they?"

Mr. Burton continued his line of enquiry.

"Have you come into touch with the Dope trade at all?"

Julian shook his head.

"Or the White Slave Trade?"

"No," said Julian, "I've a very vague idea about that."

Mr. Horace Burton smiled in a cynical, hostile way.

"Then what's the good of your joining *The Week?*" he asked. "Didn't your distinguished father tell you that we get our circulation out of the revelation of vice, corruption, scandal and crime? At least, that's my job, on the news side. I'm not an idealist, like your father! I'm the man with the muck rake."

He laughed, but in a harsh, rasping way, as though he hated the paper for which he worked, and his own part in it.

"Well," said Julian, "I might breeze around and see a few things."

Mr. Burton seemed slightly annoyed at that phrase "breeze around."

"Oh, of course, if you want to be a parlour boarder—" he exclaimed, with sarcasm, "I had a word with your father about that. 'We've no use for parlour boarders,' I said."

"And what did the governor say?" asked Julian.

Mr. Burton glanced at Julian doubtfully.

"Said you'd better do the real thing. Of course, if you feel like that—"

"I suppose your fellows have to make a start at some time?" said Julian, beginning to feel rather embarrassed by his ignorance.

"Oh, lots of them start," said Horace Burton, with a sinister smile. "They don't last long as a rule. Either I sicken their young souls by the jobs I put them to, or the Old Man asks your father to give them the sack—he hates doing it!—because they fail to produce the right kind of stuff. Of course, as you're the Editor's son, I shall have to be careful with you. Treat you tenderly, eh?"

"Oh, you needn't bother about that," said Julian, carelessly. "I've no illusions that journalism is a bed of roses. After all, I'm the son of a journalist."

"Yes," said Horace Burton, "I wonder your father—"

He did not finish the sentence, but spoke in a more friendly way.

"I don't want to discourage you, of course. But, as I was telling your father, I don't want you to start with false ideas. Lots of young fellows pass through my hands. They 'breeze down' from Oxford—like you—and imagine that journalism as it's done on *The Week* is going to be rather a lark, with opportunities for brilliant writing and front seats at all the peepshows of life. When they get the sack, or chuck the job, they spread the tale about that Horace Burton is a hard fellow. That's my reputation, as I daresay your father may have told you. They think I'm a sort of ogre because I put them through the mill, and grind their bones to make my bread. That's what I'm here for! That's how I hold down my job. Do you think the Old Man would keep me as news editor—or let your father keep me—unless I held the circulation at something like two million? How do you think I do that?"

"I haven't an idea," said Julian, although he thought of the Old Man's "principles of success."

Mr. Burton swung back in his swivel chair and smiled at his desk.

"Your father knows—though he leaves me to do the dirty work. By hunting out scandals, getting up scares, nosing out vice. By using my reporters as scavenger dogs for all that filth, without mercy and without rest. When they get tired, I scrap them. When they get squeamish, I put their little noses deeper in the dirt. Now don't say I didn't tell you. . . . And don't give me away to your father!"

Julian sat silent, thinking hard. He wouldn't give this man away to his father. What hurt him was that his father had been given away by Burton. It was a tragic and terrible thought that his father, so kind, so high-minded in his home-life, so devoted to his family, should be responsible for a paper which seemed to stink in the nostrils of its own staff. Had he a blind spot in his conscience? Or had he gradually drifted into a position which he couldn't leave without wrecking his whole life? Or was his news editor exaggerating the abomination of his own paper, and the vileness of

his own work? Julian had often jeered at *The Week,* but then he was contemptuous of all popular publications of the same kind. Lots of respectable people read the thing without disgust. Old Buckland, the "old horror," as Julian called him, was generally regarded as a great Patriot, upholding the fine old traditions of John Bull, and the divinely appointed mission of the British Empire. He claimed to be on terms of personal friendship with God. Admirable old ladies, like the Countess of Longhurst, regarded him as a bulwark against the forces of Bolshevism. The common people idolised him because he exposed the scandals of public bodies and public men, defended their pleasures against the kill-joys, and gave excellent racing tips. In the early days of the war, so his father had told him, *The Week* had been worth more as a recruiting agency than any other organ of public opinion, and had acted throughout as "The Soldier's Friend." And Julian's father was its editor. His own education and way of life had been paid for by its profits, as his father had often reminded him. It was a ghastly thought, and yet—for his father's sake—Julian began to prepare a defence in his own mind for this class of journalism. It couldn't be utterly vile if his father earned his living by it. Even the Old Man must have some good qualities somewhere, masked by his grossness and his blatancy, because Julian's father was loyal to him, in spite of contempt.

"The compromise of life!" thought Julian, his own loyalty stirred by the thought of his father's generous qualities of character.

Horace Burton was watching him while he sat there making a little pattern on the floor with the ferrule of his stick.

"Well?" he asked, less harshly. "I don't want to put you off, you know! If you're anything like your father, you ought to have the journalistic instinct. Besides, I've got to make use of you, whether I like it or not. The Editor's son, eh?"

"That's all right," said Julian. "When do I start?"

Horace Burton smiled at his desk, and reached for a bit of paper, under a paper weight.

"We're doing a big stunt on the dope traffic. There's a man who can tell you all about it, and show you things. Here's his address. Get the story, and if it's good, I'll feature it."

He handed the paper to Julian, said "Good morning, Perryam," and rang the bell for his lady typist.

Outside the door Julian looked at the slip of paper. On it was written the name "Vivian Harshe," and some number in a street off Drury Lane. He took a taxi to that address.

XXIX

FOR three weeks Julian pursued "dope" to its most secret lairs, consorted with dope fiends, watched the dope trafficker passing its white poison to neurotic girls and degenerate boys, and lived, dreamed, and worked with dope on the brain, fascinated in a horrible way by this unveiling of morbid psychology which until then had been beyond the range of his experience and imagination.

It was in the company of Mr. Vivian Harshe, who confessed that he had been addicted to the drug but claimed that he had been cured by Christian Science. Julian suspected that it was only a temporary cure and waited with a kind of dreadful interest for the almost inevitable relapse of the poor wretch who was earning a few guineas by his revelations of the habit that had wrecked his life.

He called himself an actor, and was undoubtedly a gentleman. When Julian first called on him at his address in Drury Lane, he found him lying in bed at midday in a dirty little room on the fifth floor of a block of flats inhabited, it seemed, by theatrical sempstresses, Jewish tailors, foreign waiters and their wives, single women of more than doubtful character, scene-shifters, stage carpenters, and young men, flashily dressed, shifty eyed, without visible means of livelihood, who were, according to Vivian Harshe, professional "crooks" in every branch of the game from blackmail to burglary.

Harshe had shouted, "Who's there?" when Julian had knocked at his door, and looked thoroughly scared when he opened the door an inch or two and listened to Julian's explanation of his mission from *The Week*. He was in a pair of dirty pyjamas with bare feet in slippers, and his face had something like a three days' growth of beard. Yet there was something in the look of the fellow, in his tone of voice, which suggested good breeding, in spite of his seedy appear-

ance, and the squalor of the room behind him. His hand trembled like that of a man with ague, as he lit a half-smoked cigarette after asking Julian to step in.

"Take the chair," he said, "and mind the hind leg on the off side. It's a bit crooked. I'll sit on the bed. Excuse the squalor, won't you? I'm rather down in luck at the moment."

Julian sat on the broken-legged chair which he propped up against the wall, and while he made a few opening remarks, glanced round the room. It was furnished merely with an iron bedstead, a wash-stand with cracked jug and basin in which old slops were lying, a deal table covered with oil cloth, much ink-stained, and the chair. The walls were mildewed and the paper was torn and stained, with here and there a naked patch of plaster showing beneath the cracked ceiling. On the mantelpiece was the photograph of a girl in evening dress—pretty, and certainly a lady—and next to it was a tobacco pot bearing the arms of Christ Church. It was that tobacco pot which caused Julian to feel a sudden shock of horror. Was it possible that this fellow had been at the House?

Vivian Harshe saw his glance arrested by the pot and answered his unspoken question.

"Yes. I don't look like it, do I? Eton and Christ Church. My God! And now Blindman Alley, Drury Lane. That's life!"

"I'm Balliol," said Julian, avoiding any comment on this downfall.

"I guessed as much," said the man with the unshaven chin. "Have a cigarette?"

He handed Julian a packet of Yellow Perils, and apologised for his shaking hand, which spilt one on the floor.

"My nerves have gone to pieces. Partly the jolly old war —I was wounded in Trones Wood—partly drugs, partly the terrific effort I'm making to keep off dope. Oh, I've been through Hell all right!"

And then, bit by bit, in that filthy little room, and afterwards when he had shaved himself, and looked ten years younger, and joined Julian at a restaurant in Leicester

Square, he told his story, with a candour that was based on self-pity, and the companionship of a man of his own caste, and the prospect of earning good money. It was not a pleasant story. Julian shivered once or twice at the details of it, and glanced at him sometimes with pity and disgust. It was difficult to eat with a man whose hand trembled so that he spilt things, whose cuffs were dirty and frayed, and who was rather loathesome because of the weakness to which he confessed. All the same he had had hard luck, a very bad deal of cards from fate.

He had been perfectly all right till that wound of his made his nerves go wrong. He had done pretty well in the war, as captain of a machine gun company. The M.C. and all that! After leaving hospital, and before the end of the war he had married a nice girl.

"That was her photograph on the mantelpiece. I keep it although she bunked off with another fellow, poor kid. I don't blame her. I gave her a hell of a time when I took to drugs. She couldn't understand my irritability, my sudden rages, my weak, silly tears when I couldn't get the stuff. Thought I was going mad or something. So I was, in a way. . . . Well, it didn't help me when she went off with my best friend."

It was an actress girl who introduced him to dope. A friend of his in the old days, before the war, used to serve in a tea shop in Oxford. "You know how these things happen!" He met her in Piccadilly one day and took her to lunch for old times' sake. It was after a quarrel with his wife. She noticed that his nerves were all wrong. "What you want is a bit of a tonic. Take a sniff of this, old dear!" She had a little white powder screwed up in a bit of paper, and held it under his nose and giggled. He sniffed it, and in a few moments felt wonderfully better—strangely calm and soothed. His brain seemed to clear of all worry. The fretfulness of life left him. He felt self-controlled, content, happy, even.

"That's good stuff," he said. "Where do you get it?"

The girl had laughed, told him it didn't do to be seen about with it. There was a prejudice against it! But she

could introduce him to some boys who could get it all right. On the quiet.

She did. He entered the inner gang of dope fiends, become one of the passers on, made money by it. He was caught once, and imprisoned, under another name. It was agony—that time he served—without the dope. He used to cry and rave in his cell. When he came out he tried to avoid the gang, became a film actor, and did rather well on the "movies." Then his craving came back. He tried to resist it, fought with it—and failed. There was a Chinese restaurant keeper down at Limehouse—one of the biggest merchants in dope. Harshe became his agent in return for enough to keep going, and a few extra guineas when he passed the stuff to those who wanted it. He became the slave of that yellow devil who had no bowels of compassion for all the boys and girls he ruined.

"I expect you've ruined a few too," said Julian, coldly.

Harshe flushed up to the roots of his hair, and then became deadly pale.

"I'm paying for it," he said. "I'm in purgatory."

Then he had been cured by Christian Science. Something had urged him to go into the Christian Science Church near Sloane Square, one day. It was hot, and he was feeling ill, and the church looked cool. There was a girl in there who spoke to him. She said, "You look bad," and asked if she could do anything. "I am bad," he said, "rank bad," and had a kind of shivering fit. The girl wasn't frightened. She looked at him as though she understood and said, "I guess it's dope." She was an American girl. He confessed to her—the whole damn story, and she listened quietly and nodded her head. "You've finished with that," she told him. "Stay here for half an hour saying 'Faith! Faith!' without thinking of anything. When you leave this place you won't want to touch it again." The extraordinary thing was that when he left the church and walked towards Piccadilly to meet one of the boys—he had a wad of the stuff in his pocket—he knew that he was cured. He turned off down Grosvenor Gardens, walked to the Albert Bridge, and pitched the stuff over the Thames Embankment. He hadn't touched

it since. That was three months ago. Physically he suffered agonies—see how his hand shook! But morally he was cured—perhaps the only cure ever known. A miracle, beyond doubt.

"It's Faith," he said. "If you ask me what I mean by that, I can't tell you. Some people say it's intense auto-suggestion. The Christian Scientists say it's Christ's healing power. All I know is that blasphemer and heretic as I was, I'm cured of the dope. That's good enough for me."

They were sitting in the window seat of the restaurant in Leicester Square, and Julian noticed that two well dressed girls were watching them. They were thin-faced girls, powdered and rouged, but not grossly. They looked like ladies, and were quiet in their manners. Rather ill, he thought, with dark lines under their eyes. One of them left her table and came up to the window seat, and greeted Julian's new acquaintance.

"Hullo, Vivian, dear! I haven't seen you for ages."

"Three months," he said, and as he rose from his chair Julian noticed that he steadied himself by holding on to the back.

"Don't get up," said the girl. "Will you let Gertie and me join you over a cup of coffee?"

Vivian Harshe glanced at Julian, and then spoke in a low voice to the girl.

"Coffee, yes. But nothing else this time, Madge. I've finished with that."

"Oh, go on!" she said. "You can trust me, Vivian dear. *I've* never let you down."

She gave a quick glance over her shoulder and then put her muff on the table and whispered to him.

"Quick! Nobody's looking."

Vivian Harshe shook his head and offered her a cigarette out of his paper packet.

"That's all I can give you. A gasper."

With a sudden rage she slapped the packet out of his hand and trod on the cigarettes.

"You mean beast!" she said in a fierce whisper. "You know how badly I want it!"

Then she seemed to pull herself together with a desperate effort, and smiled so that her paint seemed to crack a little on each side of her lips.

"Sorry!" she said. "I didn't mean to get cross. You're only teasing. Let me bring Gerty over."

"No," said Harshe. "It's no use, Madge. I've done with that game. I'm cured of it. A sort of miracle."

She stared at him with hate in her eyes.

"You could tell a better lie than that! You little skunk! I'll laugh when I see you lagged again."

She turned from him and for the sake of the people at the other tables spoke with affectation.

"So charmed to see you again. Give my love to Auntie!"

She moved across the room with a natural grace, but Julian noticed that when she rejoined the other girl she seemed to huddle up in her chair, and put her muff up to her face.

"Who is she?" he asked.

Vivian Harshe had sat down again, heavily, and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand as though the heat of the room made him feel faint.

"Names barred," he answered in a low voice. "But she used to be respectable."

He gave a weak laugh.

"I used to meet her in the old days at a house in Chesham Place, before the war. She used to sing at charity concerts. That's her sister."

"What makes them take to it?" asked Julian.

Harshe fumbled with a bit of bread, and Julian noticed that his finger nails were dirty and needed cutting.

"It's when their nerves begin to nag, and things go wrong. If you ask me, I should say it was the war more than anything. The jolly old war—so bracing to civilisation, so ennobling!"

He spoke with bitter and frightful irony.

"I don't see what the war had to do with dope," said Julian. It seemed to him that people blamed the war for every damn thing.

"No, you wouldn't!" said Harshe, glancing at him with a queer look of envy. "You were young enough to miss that orgy of emotion. There used to be lists of casualties. 'Dead, wounded, missing.' Those were the lucky ones. I wish to Christ I'd been in the first lot—laid out by a clean little machine gun bullet! . . . There's never been a list of other kinds of casualties—the real victims of war—still in hell's agony—girls who linked up with the first rotter that came along because he wore a uniform and looked like a hero, the girls who took the lid off and thought war a glorious lark, made for liberty and love and green liqueurs; the boys who got shell shock, the lads who made a dash for life and got hurt—between the wheels—diseased in body and brain!—the men who came back after victory and couldn't get a job, and drank themselves rotten with Comrades of the Great War. . . . Well, it's a stale old story. Nobody wants to hear about it now, thank God. But that's how dope came in. The need of a nerve cure for a nation of neurotics."

Julian listened with a sense of incredulity. This fellow was painting a lurid picture, and over-doing it. England was not a nation of neurotics. He thought of all the men he had known at Oxford—Clatworthy, Stokes Pritchard, Burnaby, Merryweather, Mervyn, all his crowd. A healthy lot, keen on every kind of game, or at least clean living and hearty on the whole. It was true that most of them were the younger brothers of the men who had been through the war. But they belonged to the same tradition. They had inherited the same spirit. Perhaps some of the weaklings had gone under, like this fellow, Vivian Harshe. It was natural that the strain had been too great for some of them—poor devils. Life seemed to be one huge strain, testing the fibre of men and women. He thought of Evelyn and his own strain. He had been very near to going under. Even now a word from her, a beckoning finger, would pull him across the boundary line of that code which he had made into a kind of religion for himself—the code of honour in his own crowd, the moral law

of his home life, the sense of self-control which he had inherited perhaps from generations of respectable, chapel-going, Bible-reading, Puritanical folks.

"It's loss of self-control," he said, as though that solved the whole question. "Why don't these people pull themselves together?"

Vivian Harshe spoke with a hint of irritation.

"It's not easy, old man, when the controls have broken. It's impossible, barring a miracle, like mine—some astounding faith cure. Without faith in some power outside ourselves we can do nothing."

"What *is* faith?" asked Julian.

Vivian Harshe gave the Eton boy's definition.

"The power of believing what you know to be untrue."

Then he laughed in his weak way and said, "There's more in it than that! Perhaps God's in it somewhere—if we can get in touch, so to speak. Sometimes I seem to get in touch with a terrific force. Life, Truth—God, call It what you like. If I lose touch I shall go under again—like a stone."

He stared across the restaurant, and a look of fear came into his eyes, as though he saw himself dropping, to the uttermost depths.

XXX

JULIAN did not see much of his father after his appointment to the staff of *The Week*. He saw more of his Armstrong Siddely car, which was always drawn up in a side street outside the editorial door between the hours of eleven and six, and latterly as late as midnight. Occasionally he saw his father pass in or out of this brass bound swing door, looking immaculate, as usual, in his morning suit with a white slip and the familiar tall hat—which Janet always brushed for him in the morning—but careworn and harried. It came as a shock one day to Julian to see how worn his father looked. He had grown heavy of late, putting on flesh, but he did not look healthy, and the lines about his eyes and lips were deeper cut. On that morning when Julian first remarked the change in him he was standing on the office steps with the face of a man oppressed by some tragic foreboding or heavy burden of care. He was waiting for his car to take him to the Savoy where he lunched almost every day with the Old Man and a group of Victor Buckland's friends in the political, business or racing worlds. Twice Julian had been invited to join them and had been struck by the utter aloofness of his father from these queer people who surrounded the proprietor of *The Week* with adulation and false bonhomie. He sat silent for the most part, while the conversation ranged from the mysteries of business politics—they seemed rather sinister and corrupt—to the inner secrets of racing stables, and the prospects of that year's Ascot. With those paper manufacturers, Conservative M.P.'s, sporting peers, advertising managers, and racing experts, Julian's father seemed to have nothing in common except his love for cigars and his fear of Socialism. He turned a deaf ear to the rather blue stories that circulated with the liqueurs, and once checked an anecdote from the Old Man himself by an abrupt reminder that they had a boy with them—mean-

ing Julian. Old Buckland was surprised by the protest, and an angry colour crept up from his heavy jowl and his puffed eyes narrowed for a moment, before he laughed heartily.

"Quite right, Perryam! Though you mustn't bring your lad up as a prig. He'll never make a journalist unless he knows the meaning of life, rough and smooth, fair and foul. Human nature is our raw material. Play on that, or close down the printing press."

Julian spoke to his father that day when he was waiting for his car.

"Hullo, Dad!"

Mr. Perryam started as though struck on the shoulder. Then his face cleared.

"Hullo, Julian, dear boy! I don't see much of you these days. I'm infernally busy with our new Prize Competition—and a thousand other things. How do you like your job?"

"I don't," said Julian. "It's a rotten game."

Mr. Perryam laughed uneasily.

"Well, I warned you! But it's teaching you a bit of life. Useful experience. We've all got to go through the mill. I did, and rather liked it."

"Peculiar taste!" said Julian, bitterly. "It's deadly degradation."

Mr. Perryam put his hand on his son's shoulder.

"Stick it, old lad! . . . It will make a man of you. . . . And I've asked young Burton not to drive you too hard."

"Oh, I'm not asking for a soft deal," said Julian, impatiently.

The car pulled out from the side street, and pulled alongside the kerb.

"Come down for the week-end," said Mr. Perryam. "Your mother misses you abominably. And Janet's fretting."

His face clouded for a moment.

"I can't think what's happening to Janet. She seems to be losing her gay spirit. All nerves and fretfulness. I'm afraid all these late nights—"

He got into his car and waved his hand to Julian.

Julian did not go down for the week-end. He wrote a letter to his mother pleading an assignment from the news editor.

"Now I'm a journalist," he wrote, "I cannot call my life my own. It's a hellish profession."

It wasn't quite true about that assignment. At least, he could have got out of it, and Burton offered him the chance.

"Don't do it if you want the week-end. I can pass it on to young Sinclair."

"I'll do it," said Julian. He hated the idea of going down to Gorse Hill with Evelyn in the near neighbourhood. He still had an open wound. Better wait until she had gone to Italy, and there would be no chance of stolen meetings or the sight of Major Iffield in his plus fours, or local gossip because he no longer went to the Iffields' house.

He had lunch that day with Horace Burton who in his queer ironical way seemed to have taken a fancy to him. They were joined by another member of the staff, one of the reporters named Frank Dickson whom Julian had run against several times in and out of the office. He was a youngish man, but prematurely bald, and with a wizened face, full of lines which deepened when he smiled. He looked any age, thought Julian, from twenty-five to fifty, but was probably thirty or thereabouts. During the War he had been an officer in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, and had been twice torpedoed on some sort of craft which he called "the old tank." His experiences, which he narrated with a whimsical humour, seemed to have filled him with a flame of passion against war, and he announced himself as an international pacifist of the most advanced type. It was evident to Julian, much to his astonishment, that Horace Burton, the news editor, was also of this brand of political opinion. He seemed to egg on Dickson to utter vitriolic stuff about the "Junkers" of England who were, it seemed, just as bad as those of Germany, and if anything a shade worse, because more self-righteous.

"They're at it again," said Dickson. "They've learnt nothing, and you can't teach 'em. First they wanted war

in Ireland, before the bodies were cold in Flanders. When public opinion wouldn't stand for it, they egged on Greece to fight Turkey, and when Greece collapsed they very nearly hustled the nation into a war with Turkey, so setting the whole East aflame. But those are merely side-shows. What they're really arranging, not deliberately, I'll admit, not even consciously, but as certainly as the smuts fall in Fleet Street, is a second edition of Armageddon."

"It's coming nearer every day," said Horace Burton. "I hope they'll like it when the last of their boys get called out to fertilise the same old fields with their pretty young bodies. And when civilisation gets its knock-out blow."

"You'll be just the right age, Perryam," said Dickson, looking at him with sardonic eyes. "In another twenty years, I guess. That will make you forty-one and not too old to fight. I shall be a looker-on, in the sere and yellow, laughing like an old gargoyle in the face of a world in ruin, and saying, 'I told you so!' until I'm choked to death with poison gas."

"Cheerful prospect!" said Julian, not appalled, but interested in these two types of newspaper men. They seemed to be trying to curdle his young blood.

Horace Burton seemed annoyed by that remark.

"You don't believe it's likely to happen?" he asked.

"I don't see the evidence," said Julian. "I'm not worrying, anyhow."

It was the same phrase that had annoyed his father one evening. It seemed to annoy Burton.

"No, curse it," he said, with a cold passion, "nobody's worrying. That's the trouble. Even the Labour Party is far more concerned with its political machine and twopenny halfpenny economics than with the foreign situation which is likely to put them all into the melting pot. What's the use of this Socialistic pap—more money for school teachers, another shilling for miners, a heavier Income Tax for the 'Idle Rich'—poor devils—when another war will reduce Europe to the level of the Roman Empire after the barbarians had done with it?"

"I thought we were all for peace these days," said Julian.

That remark brought shrill laughter from Frank Dickson.

"Our editor's son thinks we're all for peace these days," he said with sarcastic repetition. "Why, my dear child, our noble proprietor, and your worthy father, and half the proprietors and editors and sub-editors of Fleet Street, are asking for trouble with a diligence that is appalling."

"How's that?" asked Julian. "I fail to see."

He didn't fail to see altogether. Some of the articles in *The Week,* especially those by the Old Man, seemed to him unnecessarily crude in their attacks on America and in keeping up the old hate stuff against Germany, with occasional insults to France as a sign of impartial judgment. But he didn't bother much about that sort of thing, and anyhow these two men were showing rather bad form, he thought, in attacking his father in a left-handed way.

It was Frank Dickson who answered his question of "How's that?"

He glanced at Horace Burton, as much as to say, "Shall I teach this child? Is it good for him to know?"

"The Press—as a whole—with a few decent exceptions," he said, "is the enemy of Truth. It's the fermenter of strife. It's the debaucher of public opinion. At the present time Fleet Street is largely controlled by a small body of very rich men who make money by playing on the passions, the prejudices, and the ignorance of the mob. In most cases they have gained honour and profit by defending their political party which is always the same crowd with slightly different labels—the Ins and Outs. Given party allegiance, oil shares, rubber shares, Levantine loans, the wire pulling of international finance, and the lowest possible ideals, how are you going to get truth? How are you going to give a lead to the people? Look at *The Week.* Look at it! Divorce, dope, scandal, slush, and bucketshop swindles, with a careful suppression of any fact likely to elevate the public mind, and an artful incitement of all the old cruelties, passions, hatreds and follies which prevent any decent settlement of Europe. Germany can pay all the costs of the war—when she can't. France wants security —and will ruin Europe to get it and then destroy herself

by the next inevitable war. The Russian Red Army is a rabble crowd—when it's the most sternly disciplined army in Europe. America is a selfish dollar-grabbing nation—when it fed the starving people of Europe with a generosity never equalled in the history of the world. The Peace Treaty of Versailles must be maintained, though it was a violation of every ideal for which we were supposed to be fighting. We must have a big air fleet because France is building æroplanes. We must spend millions, and more millions on Naval bases because Japan is dangerous—in spite of the Washington Treaty. Our chemists are preparing a poison gas which will penetrate any mask and wither the grass in the fields because the next war will be fought in the air and victory will be to those who drop the most bombs and choke the most people. God loves the dear old British Lion especially when it thumps its tail and snarls at the whole damn world. That's *The Week*—plus sex stuff, racing tips, immense prizes, gigantic lotteries!"

"Why do you work for it then," asked Julian, irritably, "if you disapprove so strongly of its tone—"

The question seemed to amuse Burton and Dickson. They laughed and winked at each other. Horace Burton explained the seeming paradox.

"Having become journalists in our youthful ignorance of its iniquities, we get the best paid job we can find, and carry out the policy of its proprietor, according to contract, keeping our own ideals for private use on Sundays and Bank Holidays. That's the law of the Street, from which there is no escape. Presently one's ideals wear rather thin, unless they have the rugged quality of Frank Dickson there."

Yes, they were trying to curdle his blood all right, like elder boys in a school who try to scare the first term youngster with tales of brutality and hardship. Julian wasn't scared. But he realised that underneath the exaggeration of this language there was an element of truth, and he felt a pity, not for himself but for these two men, and above all for his father, who were the servants of a man they despised, and, while helping to shape public

opinion, impotent to raise its moral standard or to express their own ideals. Perhaps that was what made his father so crushed looking and so care-worn. It couldn't be good fun to work like a galley slave at a job for which he had nothing but contempt, and for a man who was just a damned old hypocrite and bully. More and more he realised the extent of his father's sacrifice for his family's sake. Always working to keep the pot boiling at a job he hated. Poor old governor!

That war stuff did not frighten him. He did not believe in it. It was the talk of the older crowd, still obsessed by the tragedy of the war years and full of dismal forebodings. Some intuition of youth, or some refusal of soul to envisage the world in ruin, told him that his crowd, the younger generation, would never allow that next war to happen. Other things might happen, unpleasant, and disturbing, perhaps disintegrating, but not that. History wouldn't repeat itself. Julian stared across the café in Fleet Street where he sat with his colleagues and for a moment wondered what his own future would be. He would have to get clear of Fleet Street before it closed about him and made him like these two men opposite, disillusioned, bitter, soured with life. If only he could write that novel in the style of Galsworthy, or a play like "The White Headed Boy." He would have to make another shot at it, after hours, even if he worked all night. . . .

XXXI

STOKES PRICHARD did not spend much of his time in the rooms he shared with Julian. His only regular hour of attendance was between nine and ten, when he partook of a leisurely breakfast in his pyjamas, with *The Daily Mail* propped up against the cruet and the gramophone on a chair by his side, nerving him—as he said—for the battle of the day by rag-times of extraordinary violence. He was invariably late for his office, owing to the difficulty of choosing a tie, the loss of a collar stud, and other accidentals of a gentleman's toilet, and complained that his uncle, of Prichard, Bentham and Backthorne, to whom he was articled, had no consideration for the liberties of life, and expected him to be looking bright and busy at the stroke of ten. "Which," said Stokes Prichard, at five minutes past ten, "is absurd!"

He generally dined out, in morning or evening dress, according to the company and class of restaurant which he honoured with his beauty and grace. If in evening dress, Julian, coming back from his journalistic adventures, found the sitting room as well as his bedroom littered with discarded garments—a sock here, a collar there—and a friendly message scrawled on a piece of paper and propped up against the clock.

"Exploring the under-world to-night. Don't sit up, dearie." Or—"Terpsichore calls me this evening. Thine till death." Or again—"Life would be endurable but for its pleasures. Off to a party with Clatworthy."

Signed with a cross and the statement "Stokes Prichard, his mark," or with the symbol of a heart pierced with an arrow.

Julian, in bed as a rule not much later than midnight, after a day of squalid experience which made him feel soiled with the dirt of life—Horace Burton, the news editor, was

driving him hard, no parlour boarder treatment—heard Prichard fumbling at the latchkey some time in the small hours, stumbling against the furniture in the sitting room, and feeling his way cautiously but not quietly to his bedroom door. Occasionally when Julian turned on his light, Prichard came pirouetting into his room, somewhat flushed in complexion at times, and sat on the edge of his bed while he smoked one cigarette after another and gave comic versions of his evening's entertainment.

He had met several Oxford men in town—Burnaby and Mervyn among them. They knew crowds of people and had some very charming sisters of their own. Mervyn's sister Pearl was quite a peach and wonderfully good fun, though not beautiful, alas! Ready for any kind of lark. A bunch of them including Pearl had gone to the Palais de Danse at Hammersmith, all among the little shop girls and their boys. On another night they motored out to the Fair at Barnet and went up in the boat swings, made themselves nearly sick on the roundabouts, and had a splendid time with the cockshies.

"You ought to have been there, old boy! This journalistic work of yours is wearing you to a shadow. Besides—"

"Well?" asked Julian.

"Well, Clatworthy and I have been talking about you. *The Week* isn't your style, old son. That dope stuff you're writing doesn't make pleasant reading. It's a bit decadent, isn't it?"

"Very much so," said Julian. "But it's a phase of life. I may as well know."

"I should give it a miss, if I were you. There are some things one doesn't want to know. At least not to wallow in."

"I agree," said Julian. "But I'm beginning to take a serious view of life, strange as it may seem. And out of the wisdom I've been gaining I'll give you a word of advice, Prichard."

"What's that, dearie?"

"If I were you I wouldn't drink so many cocktails, and

I wouldn't take a little shop girl to the picture palace. That kind of thing, I fancy, leads to other kinds of things, including dope and the devil."

Prichard laughed heartily, though his face had flushed a little.

"I plead guilty to the cocktails. It's a bad habit, though very pleasant! But how did you know about that little shop girl? Dear little Mabel?"

"I happened to see you meet her in High Street Kensington. Later in the evening I saw you coming out together from the Oxford Street Cinema."

"And what the devil were *you* doing?" asked Prichard, rather huffed by this knowledge of his private movements.

Julian smiled in his rather superior way.

"I was doing a stunt on the White Slave traffic. Following up a notorious scoundrel who entices girls to ruin. Rather on the same programme as yourself that night. A shop girl in Kensington, a cinema in Oxford Street. Strange coincidence!"

"Look here," said Prichard, angrily, "do you mean to suggest that I'm engaged in the White Slave traffic?"

"No," said Julian. "But if I were you I wouldn't play about with pretty shop girls. When fellows like you leave them in the lurch—pretty boys like you, with crinkly hair and charming manners—out for a bit of fun and no harm meant—the other swine get their chance."

Prichard shifted off the bed, flung his cigarette into Julian's water jug, and spoke coldly.

"I'm afraid you're getting a bit of a prig, Mr. Julian Perryam, reporter on *The Week*. I don't mean any harm in the world to that girl Mabel, who's perfectly respectable, dances like an angel, and has pretty little ways. Why shouldn't I be friends with her? I'm afraid your work on *The Week* has given you a nasty mind, laddy."

"It has," said Julian.

"Besides, in any case, why shouldn't I amuse myself if I want to? The kid knows what life is. She's perfectly able to take care of herself. You don't belong to the Victorian Age, do you?"

Julian sat up in bed and kicked at his bedclothes.

"Don't talk abject rot, Prichard! We're none of us able to take care of ourselves as much as you imagine. I used to think that sort of thing until—"

"Until what?"asked Prichard, curiously.

"Until something happened which made me know the bunk we talk about those things. We're just puppets pulled by wires. We can't control our own passions, minds, or hearts any better than our predecessors whom we pretend to despise."

Stokes Prichard whistled a little tune with a satiric note and seemed highly amused.

"So our noble Benedick has met his Beatrice! Well, well, now, and to think he's kept it a dark secret all this time! I suspect a lady of the name of Audrey, once of Somerville—that home of hockey-playing houris."

Julian laughed at this preposterous idea, and said, "Wide of the mark, as usual."

Then he killed a lonely mosquito on the wall above his bed and announced his desire for a night's sleep.

There was perhaps a plausible excuse for Stokes Prichard to suspect that Audrey Nye was the dark lady of Julian's sonnets. She was certainly his best friend and he felt wonderfully safe with her, so that he had no sense of uneasiness, no need of caution in meeting her several times a week. It was a kindness to her, and Julian was conscious of magnanimity (a pleasing sensation) in giving a good time now and then to "a nice kid," as he called her, in his mind, who was deplorably poverty-stricken, but full of the most amazing pluck, and endowed with a sense of humour which enabled her to laugh at the downfall of the family fortunes owing to the mystical absurdities of her remarkable father.

He had received several letters from her which had given him the general outline of her recent history in somewhat allegorical language.

"I have discovered [she wrote in one of these] that the somewhat slight smattering of the arts and graces which I absorbed at Somer-

ville, outside the more serious pursuit of hockey balls and attractive undergraduates (who eluded me), is merely a handicap in the game of real life. There is no market value in the critical appreciation of Beowulf, or Chaucer. My remarkable acquaintance with the minor poems of minor poets in the last decade cannot procure an A. B. C. lunch or provide coloured bows for the long pigtails of my little sisters. As it is obvious that I am called upon by dire necessity to maintain my entire family, including an out-of-work father, I am studyng shorthand and typewriting with a desperate industry which has already wrecked my physical beauty and undermined my moral strength."

In another letter she announced her engagement on three pounds a week as the bond slave of a Labour M.P. (one of her father's old club boys in Bermondsey) who was secretary to a Labour Institute, and one of the chief organisers of social revolution in England. By name Herbert Thorndyke,

"and rather a dear, with a heart of gold (with some alloy), a young wife who used to be a factory girl, a one-eyed view of English history, a sneaking admiration for Communism, a real love for the 'down-trodden masses,' and a firm belief that the Labour Party is the only hope of escape from another war in Europe. He works on this idea, swears at me like a bargee, quarrels with me over punctuation and the King's English, but is rather fascinated and frightened by my girlish grace, and my patrician arrogance. I work from nine till six—an hour off for a cheap lunch—with four girls educated in the Bermondsey Board Schools and the Birkbeck Institute (far more efficient in every way), and my little nose is well down to the damned old grindstone. Sometimes the thought of Somerville with its elegance of pampered youth makes me shed tears on my blotting pad. The dreams I had of a gay glad life, all jazz and jubilation, gibber at me like mocking imps. I'm in the grey, drab, underworld of London. Suburbia closes about me with its shabby gentility, and arithmetical anxieties, and my evening frocks lie unused in my bottom drawer as fading relics of departing glory. All the same I get some fun out of it, and my father, who has been twice 'sacked' in the last three months for sheer incompetence and absentminded mysticism, is so ridiculously happy that I haven't the heart to blight him by outward gloom."

There was a postscript to this letter.

"If you don't come and see me soon I'll never speak to you again."

Julian went to see her ten days after joining the staff of *The Week*. Ignorant of the whereabouts of that obscure suburb called Clapham Common, he took a taxi-cab to Clapham Junction, appalled by the dreadful squalor of its neighbourhood, only to find that he was three miles away from Audrey's address, so that by the time he had arrived at a little villa in a row of jerry-built houses, on the south side of Clapham Common—not an unpleasant spot, he thought—the taximeter registered seven-and-sixpence.

The door was opened by Celia, the younger of the two little pigtailed girls. She recognised Julian and greeted him with a cheerful "Hullo!" and the cautionary remark that if he wanted to stay to supper he would have to help wash up.

"We only keep a day servant," she explained. "Julia and I make the beds. Father gets in the way, Mother laments the hallowed past, and Audrey bosses everybody, because she's got a job in the City."

She called out at the bottom of the stairs.

"Audrey! A visitor to see you! Don't bother to powder your nose."

Audrey came downstairs in a hurry, three steps at a time.

"Julian! I thought you'd become too grand to visit the downtrodden Poor!"

"I belong to the working classes myself," said Julian.

"What's the latest scandal in *The Week?* Or the last powerful article (portrait inset) by our noble Patriot?"

They looked at each other, rather shyly, laughing at the hidden joke of things—the irony of life's reality after rose-coloured dreams.

Audrey hadn't changed. She was the same girl who had walked with him from Oxford. The two little freckles were still on the bridge of her nose.

She seemed to detect some change in him. Had that episode with Evelyn left its mark?

"You're looking older, Julian! 'Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought' or something. Still groping for an answer to the little old riddle of life?"

"I've found it," said Julian. "Futility!"

Audrey shook her head.

"Don't you believe it! There's a purpose somewhere. 'Life is real, life is earnest.' You have a talk with my Labour M.P. He's firmly convinced that when his crowd gets into power there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth. More wages for less work, shorter hours and more fun, idealised democracy and cheap culture."

"I hope you're not getting bitten with that bug," said Julian.

Audrey confessed that she was swinging a little Left.

"They *are* idealists, anyhow, poor dears!" she remarked. "Even if their ideals won't work, it's better than our superior cynicism that all's for the worst in the worst of all possible worlds."

They arranged to do a theatre, and Audrey was excited at the thought of putting on an evening frock again. She had only been to the theatre once since coming to London, and then stood for an hour outside the Pit.

"Very tiring, but rather amusing! There was a boy next to me with long hair and a red tie who discussed Bernard Shaw in a friendly and amusing way. One really enjoys the play more after a little sacrifice."

It was while she was dressing that Mr. Nye came into the little drawing-room, overcrowded with the heavy furniture from the old vicarage at Hartland which Julian had seen carried out down the garden path.

He greeted Julian with cordiality and good spirits.

"Going to give my little girl a treat? That's good of you, and she deserves it, by Jove! But for Audrey we should all be in Queer Street. I confess that so far I'm not a success in business life."

He was as boyish as usual, but shabby, with his brown hair all rumpled. Julian noticed that his cuffs were frayed, and that his collar was not too clean. But he was much amused by his successive failures to earn a living as a layman.

"The fact is," he said, laughing heartily, "I'm too honest. I got a job as a traveller in a History of England

in forty-six parts. But I had to point out in all fairness to intending purchasers that certain chapters were grossly inaccurate. All the part about the Reformation, for instance, was just a tissue of lies. Thank Heaven, I didn't sell a single copy! I only dipped into the pestilential work after I had accepted the commission. Very foolish of me!"

Then he had canvassed the Kensington district on behalf of a safety razor. He had felt compelled to admit that it was of German manufacture. That had utterly ruined the sales. He had been dismissed after an angry scene with his employer—a German Jew who said, "Vot is de good of dragging in Zhermany? Made in Zhermany? Pah! It stink in de nostrils of English people. You are von big damn fool!"

After that he had obtained the post of tutor to a delicate boy—Lord Banstead's son—who wanted to be coached for the Diplomatic Service, most charming in many ways, but half an imbecile. He had written to the boy's father pointing out that young Vicary had no more chance of passing an examination than of jumping over the moon. The old man had promptly written back a crusty letter saying that his son did not desire to jump over the moon, but did need a capable coach. He had made other arrangements.

"That was the loss of five pounds a week," said Mr. Nye, rather regretfully. "But I couldn't take the old boy's money under false pretences. After twenty weeks of my coaching young Vicary would still have been as ignorant as the beasts of the field. He was utterly incapable of grasping the most elementary knowledge. Yet one day he will sit in the House of Lords and help to govern the country!"

"It must be rather an anxious time for you," said Julian, sympathetically.

Mr. Nye was surprised at the remark.

"Anxious? Good gracious, no! I've never been so happy before. I walk on air, my dear lad. All the cares and troubles of life seem so utterly insignificant now that I have perfect faith and a continual consciousness of the presence of God. Every day I am more and more convinced

that we make most of our own troubles and that nothing matters if we leave all to the Divine Will. As old Wordsworth says, 'Getting and spending we lay waste our powers.' It's not worth it. I know, I assure you, that if you have the love of God in your heart life becomes joyous beyond all words. The most squalid scene is spiritualised. The drabbest lives have a nobility and purpose. Even pain and suffering are priceless opportunities for getting nearer to the heart of Eternal Love. As for poverty, it is not only unharmful, but is the very salt of life, if one looks at it in the right way, with courage, a sense of humour, and a little faith. . . . You remember those lines in Herodotus?—'Know that Poverty is the faithful friend of Greece. Virtue is of her company, Virtue, daughter of Wisdom and Good Governance.' My Lady Poverty! She is gracious to her children. She keeps their hearts simple. She gives them the vision of beauty. She makes them satisfied with very little. They are never cloyed. It is only in poverty that one finds one's strength, one's spirit, and the meaning of life, which is service and struggle, and love's sacrifice. . . . That sounds awful mush, doesn't it? I daren't talk like this to Audrey, because she only jeers at me, but it's true, all the same. At least it's true to me."

Julian did not argue with him. Every word he said seemed to him utterly false, a complete illusion. He had seen no beauty, but only the abandonment and ignorance of beauty in those streets round Clapham Junction with their miserable little houses in monotonous rows, and their crowds of frowsy, anxious, harried women, with dirty disease-stricken brats, and haggard unemployed men, lounging at street corners outside ugly gin-palaces. There was no spiritual joy visible among those people, no strength or virtue, but only degradation, gloom, wretchedness, ill-health, nerve strain. And this ex-clergyman, with his inner fire of fantastic faith was walking in a dream, turning blind eyes to reality, and because of his carelessness forcing his daughter to keep his family and pay for his inability to hold a job. Julian, intolerant by instinct, though theoretically tolerant, with the intellectual arrogance of his age

in life, felt a rage in his heart against this smiling, cheerful, happy-go-lucky man. And yet his rage was touched with a little envy. Perhaps it was worth while walking in a dream if it kept one cheerful. What illusionists these Old People were! They were the heirs to Victorian romanticism. Only the postwar people like himself were realists, facing the truth, starkly and without the humbug of false glamour.

He spoke a word or two to Audrey about that between the acts of "The White Headed Boy."

"Your father ought to have flourished sixty years ago, when Tennyson wrote 'The Idylls of the King' and forgot that Arthur and his Court had no kind of sanitation, and seldom washed themselves."

"He's the most absurd old darling I've ever met," said Audrey, with a tolerant laugh for her parent's absurdity. "Fifty years old, and more childish than I ever was when I sucked a 'dummy' and said 'Goo!' to my golliwog."

"How is it we're so different?" asked Julian. "Were we born with a different kind of brain, by a process of evolution?"

Audrey stared at the programme upside down.

"Are you sure we *are* so different?" she asked, after a thoughtful pause. "I mean, haven't we the same funny old instincts and jolly old impulses? My Labour Member is exactly like my Venerable Parent, only his particular fetish is Socialism instead of the Catholic Church. It's his Faith in the illimitable possibility of human progress towards divine happiness and universal peace. What my father calls Love of God he calls the Brotherhood of Man."

"I agree about instincts and impulses," said Julian, remembering his conversation with Stokes Prichard, and other things. "Only we don't give them fancy names. Besides your Labour Member is not one of us. I mean he doesn't belong to the younger crowd. He still believes in things like Democracy and International Peace, and the essential goodness of the Average Man. I take it we don't cherish any illusions about that kind of tosh?"

Audrey laughed behind her programme.

"I take it we haven't a rag of illusion to keep us decent. Rather alarming, don't you think?"

So they chatted between the acts of "The White Headed Boy" which amused them vastly, because of its understanding of the young idea.

"I'm a bit like the White Headed Boy myself," Julian confessed with unaccustomed humility. "My people are always expecting me to do brilliant things which don't seem to come off."

"You were frightfully brilliant in the *Isis!*" said Audrey.

She listened with sympathy and amusement to his descriptions of dope-hunting, but, like Clatworthy and Stokes Prichard, believed that he was too good for *The Week*. The editorship of *The London Mercury,* she thought, would suit him better, a suggestion which flattered Julian's vanity but did not destroy his sense of reality.

"I might as well hope to be Prime Minister of England."

"Well, why not?" asked Audrey. "You wouldn't make more of a mess than the present Old Man."

She put her hand on his sleeve.

"Brilliant idea, Julian! Get into politics and lead the younger crowd. Say, 'Come on, boys! It's up to us! Out with the old deadheads. They've done enough damage.' Why, Julian, with your beautiful profile and soulful eyes you will rally up every boy and girl in England, and have the old ladies saying their prayers for you."

"I should need them!" said Julian, unconsciously anticipating the pathetic avowal of a future Prime Minister.

He asked Audrey for the latest news of her brother Frank, and described his visit to the market garden and his meeting with the girl Nance. He was amused to hear that they had been "properly" married, owing to the moral pressure of Father Rivington. Audrey was amused also, not because of the marriage, but because of its effect on her father and mother. Both the Old People had been wonderfully bucked by the news, as though it made all the difference between Frank's chance of eternal salvation—and the other thing.

"Amazing as it may seem," said Audrey, "I feel a little

comforted myself. The strength of conventional ideas even in the unconventionalists!"

"One can't violate the social code without asking for trouble," said Julian, with some hesitation. "The point is whether it's worth risking the trouble."

"I wonder!" said Audrey, and they left the question there.

After the play Audrey said, "What next?" and refused to envisage Clapham Common so early in the evening. Her old Somerville spirit had returned. She was reckless of the next day's duties, with the nine o'clock tram to Southwark Bridge.

"What about making a brilliant appearance in my rooms?" asked Julian. "Stokes Prichard is giving a little supper party to-night to Clatworthy and others. Let's break in upon their unseemly mirth."

"Great Heaven!" said Audrey. "And the child has kept that up his sleeve all the evening, without a word! I'm dying to see some Oxford boys again, in spite of my leanings to the Left. To hear the King's English as it is 'spoke' in Christ Church and Brazenose!"

"Taxi!" said Julian, giving a shilling to the nearest commissionaire.

XXXII

IT was not yet midnight when Julian and Audrey mounted the narrow twisted stairs of the old Georgian house in York Street, Adelphi, and the noise of a gramophone blared out with diabolical syncopation when Julian opened the door with his latchkey.

In the little square of space which Stokes Prichard dignified by the name of "hall" a heap of coats lay on the floor, surmounted by a noble opera hat which was undoubtedly Clatworthy's. Other hats, less distinguished, including one straw, occupied the four available pegs.

"Full house," said Julian, who had played poker in his rooms at Oxford.

Stokes Prichard's melodious voice was singing above the rasping music of the gramophone:

"Father has a business strictly second hand,
Ev'rything from toothpicks to a baby grand,
Stuff in our department comes from father's store,
Even things I'm wearing some one wore before."

General conversation loud enough to be heard above Stokes Prichard and the gramophone, and a high pitched laugh, suggested that the company was not in melancholy mood.

"'Fraid I may be a bit of a nuisance," said Audrey, with humility, though her eyes lighted at the sound of revelry.

"Try it on them," answered Julian.

Audrey's appearance in her evening frock of blue silk was certainly a success. Stokes Prichard switched off the gramophone, deftly concealed a bottle of whiskey behind a bowl of roses, and said, "Audrey Nye—by all that's wonderful and delightful!"

Clatworthy, curled up in the most comfortable arm chair, with both legs on the mantelpiece and a dissolute crease in

his evening shirt, disentangled himself with a shout of surprise and was the first to hold Audrey's hand, which he raised to his lips with an air of exaggerated chivalry and the word "Carissima!"

Two other young men not unknown to Audrey as distinguished guests at the Somerville dances, relinquished their glasses and stood up for recognition. One was Paul Mervyn, a sandy-haired person with pink eyelashes and freckled face, generally known as "Mousey," and slightly illuminated for a time by the reflected glory of his father, who was a General in that episode of recent history occasionally referred to as the Late Unmentionable. The other was Ralph Burnaby, a little elegant fellow with a somewhat delicate air which deceived those who insulted him rashly, not aware that he was Oxford's second best light-weight. There was one other man in the room who stood in the background smiling through his eye glasses, fingering a pointed beard, and holding a briar pipe. It was Henry Caffyn, who had made a dramatic appearance in his pyjamas one night to protest against the interruption of his efforts to save the world. He was forgotten by the younger crowd who, at the sight of Audrey Nye, rushed into reminiscences of "priceless" hours they had enjoyed with her in a life which seemed incredibly remote.

It was Mervyn of the pink eyelashes who blinked and laughed as he recalled a certain afternoon on the Cher when Audrey and he had overturned their canoe and waded ashore like drowned rats, to the indecent delight of Clatworthy and Julian lying in their punt.

It was little Burnaby who, in his mild, girlish voice, asked Audrey if she remembered that famous occasion when she rode pillion on his motor bike to Woodstock and he upset her gently and gracefully in a ditch, in order to avoid a char-à-banc full of trippers whose ribaldry was disgusting.

It was Clatworthy who pooh-poohed these minor episodes of Audrey's career by claiming the leading part in that historic scene at Maidenhead when this lady had dared him to climb up the chandelier and he had fallen under an avalanche of crystals.

"Tragic night!" said Audrey, though she laughed with flushed cheeks at these exciting memories. "My last night of joyous youth! It seems a million years ago."

"Good Lord, yes!" said Clatworthy. "It belongs to another age. The Early Pleistocene."

It was exactly three months.

"And what are you all doing?" asked Audrey. "How are you all getting on with that grim battle called Life? What sort of footprints are you making in the sands of time, and all that?"

Burnaby claimed that he was making some pretty deep footprints. In fact he had put his feet into things rather too deep. He had quarrelled with his father over some question of money—a squalid argument—and he was now cut off without a shilling and earning his livelihood as a teacher of dancing at Hammersmith Broadway. It was amusing, but hard on the feet, and not profitable.

Mervyn was in the same plight as regards his father. He had refused to go into the Army because he was an anti-militarist after reading "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." That had annoyed the old gentleman profoundly. Having sacrificed more lives than almost any other General in the War, he thought it only right that his son should live up to that noble tradition. Mervyn was now one of the unemployed. He had thought of emigrating to California and growing cocoanuts, or whatever they did grow in that part of the world. His knowledge of the classics would probably be very helpful in the culture of cocoanuts.

"The fact is," said Clatworthy, "that I am the only one of us to whom an Oxford education has been really necessary. As junior office boy in a department of the Foreign Office dealing with a mysterious state called Czecho-Slovakia—I haven't found it on the map yet—my Oxford accent, and that insolence of manner which I acquired at Christ Church, are what the people of our caste call a *sine qua non,* which being interpreted, dear children, means 'without which no.' It has an impressive effect with foreign visitors, journalists, like our friend Julian here, who quail before my arrogant eye, and everybody's satisfied that Brit-

ish Foreign Policy is still sinister in its intelligence and Machiavellian in its subtlety."

Audrey laughed, and threw a cushion at Clatworthy.

"Johnny! Our poor old foreign policy will be wrecked if ever you become an Ambassador and make one of your monkey faces at the wrong time. It will plunge us into war as sure as fate. Fancy its effect on a German Junker!"

It was at this stage in the conversation that Henry Caffyn emerged from the background.

"Having been completely forgotten, as becomes old age sitting in the corner while youth plays, I propose to slip away before pillow fighting begins. As a pacifist I think discretion is the better part of valour. But before I go I should like to be introduced to this lady."

Stokes Prichard apologised. Julian apologised. Clatworthy apologised. In the excitement of Audrey's appearance they had completely forgotten their distinguished visitor.

"Miss Audrey Nye. Mr. Henry Caffyn."

"The most famous lady in Oxford, the most famous critic in the world," said Clatworthy, in his best diplomatic style.

Henry Caffyn took Audrey's hand, and his eyes twinkled.

"We two famous people must put our heads together. I'm trying to get hold of the younger crowd to shape things on a new plan—an International League of Youth, more powerful than the poor old League of Nations, and less bureaucratic. The Young Idea—taking root, growing, spreading, flowering over the graves of old traditions, old cruelties, old follies. You seem to have Oxford at your service, Miss Nye. Won't you help me?"

Audrey laughed and blushed. She knew Henry Caffyn's work, and could recite some of his poems, which she adored.

"I'd be glad to help," she said, "but the young idea is only the old idea in a different kind of slang."

Henry Caffyn looked at her in a rather startled way.

"I wonder if you're right," he said. "If so, I'm all wrong."

He raised her hand to his lips in a courtly old-fashioned way.

"Anyhow, I'm on the side of youth."

He waved his hand to the little party of men.

"Thanks for letting me sit and listen," he said. "It made me forget my grey beard."

After the door was shut upon him, Audrey asked a question rather breathlessly.

"What's he here for? Where did you find him?"

Stokes Prichard explained.

"Our row prevents him from working. He comes down and listens while we yap together. Also he rather likes our whiskey."

"He's studying us," said Julian, "as remarkable specimens of the younger crowd. God knows what he makes of us."

They forgot him again, as youth forgets old age which is always a nuisance in the room.

It was two o'clock before Julian put Audrey in a taxicab and paid the driver in advance for his fare to Clapham. Clatworthy, Burnaby, Mervyn and Prichard stood round the cab and raised a cheer as it departed. Audrey waved to them until she turned the corner into John Street. Then Stokes Prichard and Julian returned to their rooms with laughter at the sight of Clatworthy walking arm in arm with Mervyn and Burnaby, the noble opera hat at the back of his head, and his legs a little unsteady because the fresh air was overstimulating after a good dinner with Veuve Clicquot, three glasses of Johnny Walker, and the reminder of his hopeless love for Audrey.

XXXIII

AT six o'clock next morning Julian was awakened by an angel twanging on a harp string. At least that was what he dreamed at the time of waking, and for a moment the angel turned into Audrey playing a guitar at the end of a punt. But after these agreeable visions he decided that it was not a harp string or a guitar, but an electric bell ringing insistently in the square space which Prichard called the hall. He was inclined to ignore it. It was probably some telegram from the news editor of *The Week* sending him off to interview an actress or directing him to track down the latest scandal about a motion picture star. Or it might be the milkman, demanding last night's can. Or it might be that the damned bell had fused its wire.

After two minutes of that penetrating *ping-ping-ping,* Julian uttered the most lurid oath he could remember, put a dressing gown over his pyjamas, and opened the door. He gave an exclamation of profound astonishment when he saw Janet standing there.

She was in evening dress, the one with forget-me-nots on a white gauze, with a light cloak over her shoulders, and she looked dead beat, with black lines under her eyes and bright spots of red on very pale cheeks.

"Hullo, Julian," she said. "You do take some waking, don't you?"

She spoke in her usual slangy way, but with a kind of desperate effort to be true to form. She swayed a little as she stood there in the doorway and put the tips of her fingers to her forehead for a moment.

"Where have you come from?" asked Julian. "And what on earth have you been doing?"

"That's all right, old boy. Don't ask too many questions while you keep me waiting on the doorstep. Have you got a sofa for me to sleep on? I'm dog tired."

She went into the sitting room, let the cloak drop from her shoulders, flopped into the arm chair and sat there like a crumpled Columbine, with her head drooping.

"Great Scott!" said Julian, scared by her appearance. "You look as if you'd been out all night. What would the mater say if she saw you like this?"

Janet jerked up her head in a frightened way.

"The mater mustn't know," she said, rather breathlessly. "As a matter of fact, Julian, I'm relying on your brotherly comradeship. I told the mater I was spending the night with the Nicklin girl. Don't give me away!"

"Where *did* you spend the night?" asked Julian.

Janet hesitated, and a pale colour crept into her cheeks.

"Cyril and I with one or two others—including Evelyn Iffield—went to a night club in Soho and danced until daylight. Very merry and bright and all that!"

"And do you mean to say Cyril left you to come here alone?"

"Hardly that," said Janet. "To tell you the truth—"

She was silent, and the bright spots of colour faded from her cheeks.

"Well?" asked Julian.

She looked at him strangely, as if considering how he would take the truth if she told him, and if she should tell.

"Cyril and I left the crowd before the show was over. I went to his rooms in Duke Street. It was three o'clock then."

"Almighty God!" said Julian, not in blasphemy.

He felt a sudden chill creep over him. A sense of calamity beyond all words stunned him in the presence of this child who was his sister.

"What happened?" he asked, harshly.

Janet shrugged her shoulders, bare above her gauzy frock.

"We had a bit of a scene . . . and after that a row. It was my fault, mostly. I shouldn't have gone with him. But all the same—he was a damned beast."

She suddenly put her face down in her hands and cried with a passion of tears.

Julian lit a cigarette and stared at her gloomily. With

her bare neck and arms in her little flowered frock she looked to him like a child crying over a broken doll, as he had seen her when they were in the nursery together. This thought struck him poignantly, with a kind of stab. He ought to have looked after her more. He had believed too easily that she was old enough to look after herself, and had jeered at his mother's anxiety because of Janet's revolt against the old proprieties and prohibitions, as he had jeered at them in his own case. He felt a sense of mad rage against Cyril Buckland. He would go and smash his face in, the damned scoundrel! The dirty skunk, to play about with a girl like Janet, and tempt her to his rooms, and behave like a beast. He'd kill the fellow . . .

He went down on his knees and put his arms round his sister, clasping her tight.

"Janet, old girl! Tell me—for God's sake—what happened in Cyril's rooms?"

She gave a little moan and put her forehead against his shoulder.

"I'm tired," she said, "and my head is splitting."

He clenched his hands and whispered to her.

"Janet! Never mind that now. Tell me. That brute Cyril? Was he drunk or something?"

Janet gave a restless movement as he held her.

"It wasn't his fault altogether," she said in a low voice. "I asked for trouble, all right. It was my idea that I should go to his rooms. Only I didn't think—"

"Oh, Hell!" said Julain. "Oh, Hell!"

He unclasped his arms from about her and paced up and down the room in a frenzy of fear and rage.

Janet sat still, mopping her eyes with a little lace handkerchief. Presently she spoke in a weary voice which was almost fretful.

"I suppose you couldn't make me a cup of something hot? Tea or something. I feel a bit faint, and my head is awful."

"I'll make you some coffee," said Julian.

He went into the little kitchen next to Prichard's bedroom, but when he had made the coffee and come back to the sitting room he found Janet asleep in the arm chair, with

her head drooping sideways and her hands lying limp in her lap. He did not wake her, but sat opposite in the other chair, with the coffee getting cold on the table. He took a sip of it, because he felt chilled to the lips. Then he crept into the passage and came back with his overcoat, which he laid lightly over his sister. She stirred a little, and gave a long quivering sigh.

She reminded him frightfully of some of those girls he had seen when he was doing the dope story, dead white, with dark lines under their eyes. This idea shocked him so horribly that he groaned aloud and as though disturbed by it, Janet moved one of her hands and gave a little moan.

Julian sat forward in his chair with his head between his hands, motionless. A thousand horrible thoughts racked his brain, and over and over again he cursed Cyril Buckland with a murderous hate in his heart which seemed to burn there. The image of Evelyn came into his mind and added to his torment. How could he blame Janet, or even Cyril—damn him!—when he was still rotten with passion for Evelyn Iffield, ready to go off the deep end with her, if she so much as beckoned him with the tip of a finger? Supposing Evelyn had come to his rooms—without Stokes Prichard in the place? Would he have shown the door to her with a moral sentiment? No. He couldn't lie to himself like that! He would have trembled in every limb with passionate joy, made a fool of himself to the ultimate limit. Evelyn had made one of the party with Janet. That thought nagged at him. She wasn't fretting because he had been warned off by her husband. She had heaps of friends to fall back on for comradeship. She didn't care a jot because he was broken and alone, with all his light gone clean out. He could see her at that night club in Soho, with her laughing eyes, her grace of body, putting a spell upon any poor devil who came within her orbit—even the waiters! Probably she had lied to Major Iffield, as she used to lie when they had their secret meetings—and pretended that she was staying the night in town with friends. Well, it wouldn't be altogether a lie. She would have breakfast with them and sleep till lunch time. All that was permissible

in the code of the younger crowd. A little harmless deception towards the Old People for the sake of liberty. He had approved of that himself. It seemed reasonable. But now, with his sister sleeping there in the chair opposite, like a little broken bird, after an episode which made his blood run cold, it did not seem so right. It seemed hideously and damnably dangerous. Perhaps they were all wrong in this idea of scrapping the old conventions. Perhaps the old Victorian ideas of life, the old stuffy notions of chaperons and safeguards, were not so absurd after all. Anyhow things had gone pretty wrong with Janet and himself. What would his father and mother say? He would have to tell them something. It would kill them if anything happened to Janet. His father worshipped her very shadow, followed her about with his eyes as though every movement she made were music to him, and every smile she gave him a gift of grace. He had pampered her since she had lain in her cradle, and had never given her an angry word, so that she had been able to wheedle anything she wanted out of him. He would crumple up if he knew that Janet had gone wrong.

Julian sat there with his head between his hands and the lines of his face hardening as though something of his youth had passed. Once he felt his fingers wet, though he was not aware of tears. Presently he dozed off, in an uneasy sleep with troubled dreams.

It was Stokes Prichard who waked the brother and sister, before the old woman came in to cook the breakfast. He still had that habit of early rising for a long and leisurely toilet which had annoyed Julian when they shared rooms at Oxford. That morning he came searching for his cigarette case, in a blue silk kimono over his pyjamas. He came in whistling a tune which suddenly stopped as he saw Julian and Janet in the opposite arm chairs—Julian with his head on his chest and his hands between his knees, Janet in her crumpled frock, like a Columbine after the masque, with her little white face lolling sideways on the arm of the chair, and her honey-coloured hair half uncoiled, and Julian's coat tossed on one side.

Stokes Prichard looked as though he couldn't believe his eyes. He stared incredulously from Julian to Janet. He had seen Julian go to bed, heard him through the thin wall drop his boots on the floor, and fling himself between the sheets. How on earth had this pretty girl come into his rooms, this amazingly pretty girl, like the Sleeping Beauty in the fairy tale, like the girl of whom he had dreamed a thousand times between waking and sleeping, but had never met in the living world?

He took a pace backwards, meaning to creep out of the room, but knocked against the table on which was a cup of coffee. That noise wakened Julian with a start. He sat up in his chair and said, "What's the matter?"

Janet stirred, raised herself slightly, opened her eyes wide, and said, "No. We mustn't, Cyril! Please, please!"

She was still dreaming for a moment. But then she sat up, so that Julian's overcoat slipped onto the floor.

"Where am I?" she asked, vaguely.

"It's all right," said Julian.

Janet remembered. A wave of colour flushed her face and neck, and a look of shame, and fear, and misery crept into her eyes.

It was then that Stokes Prichard spoke.

"Sorry, old man," he said to Julian, "I had no idea you had company. I was looking for a cigarette."

He smiled in his most amiable way, as though it were the most natural thing in the world to find Julian with a young lady at this hour of the morning.

Julian stood up and stretched himself. He felt stiff in every bone. He was also conscious that he would have to lie very rapidly to Stokes Prichard.

"This is my sister Janet," he said.

He thought hard for a plausible tale.

"She missed the last train home—after a little binge in town—and sought sanctuary here at a late hour when you were sleeping like a babe."

"Good Heavens!" said Stokes Prichard, "and you asked her to sleep in the most uncomfortable chair that ever came out of the Tottenham Court Road?"

"I'm afraid we talked rather late, and fell asleep," said Janet.

Julian marvelled at the way she pulled herself together. She answered Prichard's little courtesies—he behaved at once with his usual gallantry—as though she were in a perfectly normal state of mind, though Julian, watching her, could see that she was suffering. There was a look of pain in her eyes, and more than once she put her hand up to her head as though it still ached. But she smiled when Stokes Prichard deplored the fact that he had not been able to offer her his bed while he slept on the sofa in the sitting room, and laughed when he hinted that the old woman who "did" for them would be vastly surprised to find her at the breakfast table.

"I'm afraid it will lead to scandal in York Street, Adelphi!" she exclaimed.

"Girls are wonderful actresses!" thought Julian. "How easily they lie and hide their feelings!"

Janet retired to his room to "wash and brush up" while Prichard arrayed himself in his most exquisite lounge suit, obviously excited by her presence in the next room. Once indeed he came back to the sitting room to say a word to Julian who was tidying up the relics of the last night's party.

"I say, old boy, congratulations on your sister! She's marvellous. The most exquisite rose of England's June!"

He could not refrain from his infinite capacity for poetical quotation.

"She had a brother, and a tender father
And she was loved, but not as others are
From whom we ask return of love—but rather
As one might love a dream; a phantom fair
Of something exquisitely strange and rare—"

"That's all right," said Julian. "Go and finish dressing and stop spouting that bilge, for Heaven's sake—!"

The old woman came and laid the breakfast things and cooked the usual meal.

"There will be three for breakfast," said Julian. "My sister."

The old woman winked heavily, and gave a witchlike laugh.

"Some sisters have all the luck," she said, mysteriously. "When I was a young girl I'd more brothers than I could count on both hands. The last young gentleman in these rooms—"

"Get on with your work and clear out!" said Julian, sternly.

"Oh, all right, dearie!" said Mrs. Sullivan. "I can turn a blind eye all right, and no tales told."

When Janet reappeared, still in her evening frock but with her hair tidy again and a less crumpled look, the old woman greeted her amiably.

"Good morning, Missy. Ain't you feeling cold with them pretty bare arms? Shall I light the fire for you?"

"Well, it would be a good idea," said Janet, graciously.

She avoided Julian's eyes. He was conscious of that, and he watched her, wondering whether he had not exaggerated his fears for her, whether his agonising thoughts had not been rather foolish. Her usual colour had returned—almost. The dark lines had faded out. She looked fresh and childlike. Only a slight nervousness of movement, and a drooping of her eyelids, revealed anything unusual in her state of mind. She listened to Prichard's prattle at the breakfast table with apparent pleasure, and pleased him enormously by a little compliment about his taste in decorating the rooms. He was later than ever for his office, and did not depart until well after half past ten, after a promise from Janet that she would come to tea one day.

"A nice boy," said Janet, when he had gone, "but if he'd stayed ten minutes longer I should have screamed."

The brother and sister were silent for a while. Julian dropped the fag end of his cigarette into his coffee cup and stirred it with a spoon. He was not thinking of that. He was wondering what on earth he could say to Janet to get things straight with her, to know the worst, to face up to it. It was more difficult to talk of things like that in the cold light of day.

"Look here," he said, slowly, "about last night. What are we going to do about it?"

Janet did not answer for a moment. She sat there with tightened lips and a little frown on her forehead.

Then she raised her head and looked into Julian's eyes.

"We're going to do nothing about it," she said, with a little quiver in her voice. "I rely on your loyalty, Julian. That's why I came to you. If you say a word about it to a living soul I'll never speak to you again. I'll cut you dead in the street."

"We can't leave it like that," said Julian. "It's impossible. I'll go and bash that fellow's brains out, for one thing."

"Rot!" said Janet. "Don't talk melodrama, Julian. I made a little fool of myself with him, I egged him on, we had a scene together, and I got frightened and did a bunk. That's all there is in it."

"I believe you're lying," said Julian, in a low voice. "Why did you weep your heart out last night?"

Janet answered with a laugh that sounded harshly.

"Nerves, old boy! One of those nerve storms that affect the weaker sex in times of emotion."

Julian was silent again, staring at the breakfast things, and Janet watched him out of the corners of her eyes.

"Well," he said at last, "I hope to Heaven you're telling the truth. You've given me the scare of my life."

He rose from the table and went to the window and looked down to the passing traffic. Then he turned suddenly and spoke with passion.

"Look here, for God's sake, let's talk straight. I've been seeing something of life lately on that vile rag—the seamy side. I've seen girls like you drugging themselves to death and leading a life of hell, because they made one false step, or slipped downhill before they knew what was happening. It's so damned easy, Janet, for girls like you. Don't think I'm talking like a prig or anything. I'm not a saint. I'm ready to go off the deep end any old time! I'll admit that. But I'm thinking of the pater and mater, for once. It

doesn't matter what I do so much. I'm a man. But if anything happened to you it would kill them."

Janet looked at him mockingly. She had tears in her eyes, but there was an angry light in them.

"You *are* talking like a prig. It doesn't matter so much what you do—you're a man! Oh, very nice! But where does the girl come in? I mean your girl. You can play about as much as you think fit, but if I make a little fool of myself your saintly soul is horrified, and the whole world is outraged. I don't look at things in that way. What's wrong for the man is wrong for the woman."

"I agree," said Julian. "But that doesn't make things any better, when they both go wrong."

He waved aside the argument, and asked a series of jerky questions, angrily, anxiously.

"That fellow Cyril? That damned brute? What's he playing at? Does he want to marry you? If so, why don't you get engaged and put things straight? Surely it must be one thing or the other?"

"It's the other," said Janet. "He's only been amusing himself with a silly little schoolgirl. So tempting and sweet! So fresh and innocent! He hasn't the thought of marriage in his head."

"The swine!" said Julian, fiercely.

"And so," said Janet, "I'm in the cart, little brother. Well, serves me right."

She broke down again, and wept a little, but not much.

"You had better fetch me a taxi," she said, presently. "I've got to go to that Nicklin girl to establish an alibi. Tell the mater I'm staying there for a day or two."

In the taxi she put out her hand through the window and touched Julian's sleeve.

"Don't fret. I'll pull through all right. And remember—I rely on your honour. As a pal and a brother. Not a word to a living soul. Promise?"

"I promise," he said. "But play the game, old girl."

As the cab went away he saw Janet put her hands up to her face, and something in her eyes caused his heart to give a kind of turn.

XXXIV

HENRY CAFFYN, that eccentric genius who lived on the floor above the rooms which Julian shared with Stokes Prichard, knocked at the door a few evenings after Janet's visit, and invited the two young men to come upstairs for coffee and conversation.

"There'll be a crowd of young fellows," he said. "It's my Saturday reception of international youth. They like to call on their old uncle and hear the words of wisdom which fall from his withered lips. But I learn more from them than they do from me! They're providing material for my book on 'The Coming Generation.' Will you join them?"

Stokes Prichard winked at Julian and answered the invitation with polite sarcasm.

"Very kind of you, sir. I'm sure Perryam and I will be glad to contribute a chapter to your great work. I suggest the title 'Oxford Types,' or 'The Noblest Specimen of Intellectual Aristocracy.'"

Henry Caffyn's eyes twinkled, though he answered with his usual gravity.

"Exactly! I'm keeping other types for my chapter on 'The Snob Instinct, and Intensive Training in the Art of Ignorance.' Well, nine o'clock, then?"

"Delighted!" said Stokes Prichard, "especially as I am strangely at a loose end this evening, owing to the infidelity of friendship."

He alluded to a change of plans on the part of Clatworthy who had cancelled a dinner party owing to his father being ill.

Julian also accepted Henry Caffyn's invitation. As it happened it was necessary, or at least desirable, to go out that evening. A letter had come to him that morning in a handwriting which had caused him to draw a quick breath and

hide the letter in his breast pocket until he could get back to his bedroom from the breakfast table and read it without Prichard's observation and innuendoes. It was from Evelyn Iffield—just a few words.

"I am coming up to town this morning and will call round at your rooms this evening, if I can slip away from dull friends. About ten o'clock. There are things I want to say. So try to be alone, and, in any case, be in!

"Your unforgetful friend,

"Evelyn I."

Julian read these words with a sense of excitement which made him pale. They were the first lines he had had from her since coming up to town, and he was glad but alarmed to get them. He was afraid of her visit. He was a coward at the thought of seeing her again. It would reopen his wound, uselessly. It would bring him again under the spell of her beauty and enticement when it was far better to put her out of his mind and heart. For her it was nothing. She would tease him, mock at him, play with him, and thoroughly amuse herself. For him it was bitterness and futile emotion. She wanted to slip away from dull friends! That was her only reason for coming to these rooms. It would be a little less dull to stroke his hand, and say, "Why can't we be friends?" and to fondle him a little and then call him "foolish boy." . . . He thought of sending a note round to the address on her letter and saying, "Very sorry, I shall be out this evening." He was quite certain that he would save himself humiliation and much foolish heart trouble if he did that. But he didn't. The day had slipped away and he hadn't written that note, though several times he had gone to his writing desk to do so. . . . It would be pleasant to see her again, to hear her laugh, to feel the touch of her hands, to take the kiss which she would certainly offer him. Why not, after all? Why funk it? Why not take two kisses instead of one? Why be discreet and prudent, and priggish? . . . Many times the thought of Janet answered those questions. He had raged and wept because she had gone to Cyril's rooms.

He had talked high morality to his sister, and had been shocked to his inmost soul because of her abominable adventure with that brute Cyril. Now Evelyn was coming to his rooms, unless he sent that message and said, "Don't come!" High morality would go to pieces if she preferred otherwise. She had something to say to him. Supposing she said, "I've done with Major Iffield—that dull husband of mine. You can have me if you want me, Julian!" What principle had he, what law of faith or honour, to resist such an offer as that? None. Absolutely none! All that talk with Janet was sheer insincerity, monstrous hypocrisy, if the position were reversed in his own case. Better send the note. Better send it. And yet, it would be joy to see her again, and he wanted to see her.

So he was torn by two opposite forces in conflict, pulling against each other while his personality and will power seemed to look on and wait for the decision.

Henry Caffyn's invitation gave him another chance. He could go upstairs with Stokes Prichard and stay there till midnight. Evelyn would come and ring the bell. Three times, perhaps. Then she would go away, thinking that he had not received her note. Yes, that would be the simplest way, and the best. So he thought it out and decided, while Stokes Prichard was chatting with Henry Caffyn.

"Do we dress?" asked Julian.

"Good Lord, no!"

Henry Caffyn laughed at the idea.

"My visitors mostly sleep in their clothes! At least some of them look as though they do—one or two Russians and a Czecho-Slovakian artist—a young genius!—and de Berthencourt, the French journalist."

He sloped away, fingering his pointed beard, and said, "See you later, boys."

They left their rooms at nine o'clock and as the door clicked behind him, Julian half regretted his decision and was filled with compunction because in an hour or so Evelyn would be standing there getting no answer to her ring. Rather caddish! Well, better that than to play the fool

with a girl who was only touching his nerves with her finger tips to make them jump, as she played Chopin for its subtle touch of emotion.

A young man with pale blue eyes behind gold-rimmed glasses, and close-cropped head above a Saxon-looking face, stood in the passage outside, raised a good looking bowler, and said, in a strong foreign accent:

"Pardon me, gentlemen, can you direct me to Mr. Henry Caffyn?"

"The floor above," said Prichard. "Number Ten."

The young man thanked them ceremoniously, and went ahead upstairs.

Stokes Prichard turned to Julian and raised his eyebrows.

"German!" he said in a low voice. "I don't think I'll proceed on this adventure. 'They'll cheat you yet, those Junkers!'"

"The German idealist, probably," said Julian. "I daresay there's one, and Henry Caffyn has found him out, and keeps him as a tame pet."

He spoke ironically, having no passion of hate against the former enemy, but complete indifference on the subject of Germany.

"Well," said Prichard, "I'm not going to shake hands with the rasper. He may have killed my brother."

"Your brother may have killed his," answered Julian. "It was about even on the Western Front, I'm told."

They went upstairs and found Henry Caffyn's door open and several young men of strange appearance hanging unpleasant looking hats of the dump variety on vacant pegs. Beyond, in the big room that corresponded to their own sitting-room, Henry Caffyn himself stood in the centre of a group of young men and women so alarming in aspect that Stokes Prichard looked really frightened and turned abruptly, with the obvious intention of beating an immediate retreat.

"Don't rat!" said Julian. "They look fierce, but I'm sure they're tame."

It was quite easy to make a remark of that kind without being overheard, because an incessant tumult of conversation

and laughter poured out of Henry Caffyn's rooms. It was conversation in several languages, among which Julian's quick ear picked out English, French, and German, and one dominant unknown tongue, which he guessed was Russian. Henry Caffyn himself seemed able to speak all four with ease and fluency, and his Don Quixote-looking head, with pointed white beard and upturned moustache, rose above all other people in the room and seemed the centre of its life. Julian noticed how the throng eddied round him, and how eagerly some of them pressed forward to get a word with him, or to listen to his talk. The ladies were the most alarming to Stokes Prichard, though he looked askance at two or three young men with black, brooding eyes and lank hair —Russians, undoubtedly—and others of English type, positively shocking to his soul because they wore trousers creased in the wrong places, collars at least an inch too high, and ties that would have caused a shudder in the High at Oxford if exhibited by an undergraduate. Some of the ladies were beautiful, and some of them elegant, but here and there were types of masculine femininity—young women with short hair not even "bobbed" but brushed like a boy's—who looked aggressively intellectual and almost appallingly plain. It was they who had scared the sensitive soul of Stokes Prichard. He was soothed, however, when Henry Caffyn took him by the hand, led him to the prettiest girl in the room—a dark-haired girl like an Irish colleen—and said, "Miss Leigh, here's a young fellow who plays ragtime like an inspired monkey. For goodness' sake convert him to the melody of Mozart, which you play like an angel."

It was Francine Leigh, the pianist, and Julian was glad of Prichard's luck. That would keep him quiet for a long time. As far as Julian was concerned, he desired no converse with any of these people, pretty or plain—his mind was obsessed with the thought that Evelyn might be on her way to his rooms—but he had to make himself civil when Henry Caffyn introduced him, with a few genial words, to a young man with a high forehead, short nose, and aggressive-looking face, who wore a ready-made lounge suit and a green tie.

"Thorndyke, this is my neighbour—below-stairs, Julian Perryam. A quiet fellow, searching for the truth of things, I believe. Tell him what Labour proposes to do when it gets into power and forget its internecine strife. He's against you, I fancy, so you ought to interest each other."

Julian was not in the least interested either in the future of Labour or in Herbert Thorndyke. He was wondering how many times Evelyn would ring at the bell downstairs before going away and despising him for an ill-mannered pup. But he asked himself vaguely where he had heard the name of Thorndyke before. The man to whom he had been introduced gave him the key.

"Aren't you a friend of Miss Audrey Nye?" He spoke with a slight Cockney accent, and Julian noticed afterwards that he had occasional difficulty with his aspirates.

"Yes. Do you know her?"

Thorndyke laughed in a high, thin voice.

"I see her every day. She does a bit of typing for me. I'm the secretary of the Labour Institute at Bermondsey, in the time I can spare from the House. I used to know her father when he ran the boys' club in the Walworth Road. I was one of his club boys."

It was the loss of the "h" to House that hurt Julian's ear most. But he checked the snobbishness of his instinct by the thought that this fellow was a Member of Parliament and one of the leaders of the Labour Party at an age certainly not fifteen years older than Julian. "In fifteen years or fifty I shan't have the ability this fellow has won by grinding work," thought Julian, with unaccustomed humility. "Probably he knows a hundred times as much as I do about world history, books, and present-day facts."

"She's a wonder, is Miss Nye," said Thorndyke. "I like her sense of humour. Of course I get pretty rattled when she corrects my English style, and still more when she contradicts me flatly about the things I really know, such as the relations of Capital and Labour. But we get on splendidly, although I work her like a dog. Not that I want to, but there's a lot to do, and it's my job to get it done."

Julian looked at his aggressive jaw and his deep-set eyes —the eyes of a fanatic, in spite of a humorous light in them —and he thought that this man would get most jobs done, if he set his mind to them.

"Who are all these people?" asked Julian. "What's their purpose in life?" He didn't want to know. He was wondering whether, after all, he had not better "chuck" this party and wait for Evelyn on the floor below. . . . No. That would be pretty weak, after making up his mind!

Thorndyke glanced round the room and laughed.

"This is the International League of Youth," he said. "These are the leaders of the Future, the heralds of the New Idea. The United States of Europe. World Peace. Brotherly Love between French and Germans. Good wages for honest toil, no poor and no rich, a reign of justice, liberty, bath rooms, and higher education! Well, I wish them luck, but though I believe in their ideals, I fancy there'll be a lot of strife before we get there. Aren't you one of them, by the bye?"

"No," said Julian, "I'm an outsider. And I'm not an idealist, thank goodness."

That last remark startled Herbert Thorndyke, and amused him. He looked at Julian with a playful light in his dark eyes.

"Rather bored with idealism, eh? Well, we talk a lot of flap-doodle about it. The amount of hot air I've let out! All the same we have to work out some sort of ideal, and get keen on it. Otherwise there would be no progress at all."

"I don't believe in that word Progress," said Julian. "Isn't it rather over-done? How have we progressed during the last three thousand years or so?"

He asked these questions curtly, almost uncivilly. Another little question was much more urgent in his brain. "Shall I go down and open the door to Evelyn?"

Herbert Thorndyke said something about "cycles of history," "civilisation and barbarism," "the rise of Democracy," "the status of the Average Man." Julian did not follow

him very clearly, but he seemed to think that humanity had a chance of getting on an upward curve and that "Labour" would give it a lift in that direction.

"You ought to join us," he said.

"Who?" asked Julian, vaguely.

"The Labour Party. We want young fellows like you. Lots of chance for talent and character! We're not so narrow as we were. We're broadening."

Julian smiled in his superior way.

"I'm afraid I don't approve of the Labour programme. Not that I know a thing about it!"

Herbert Thorndyke was not huffed by his words.

"It might be worth your while to read a bit about it, my lad. Miss Nye could give you some of our pamphlets."

"No, thanks," said Julian, hurriedly. "I won't trouble her."

"Of course," said Thorndyke, ignoring this rebuff, "our accents are a little strange in the House of Commons, and the manners of some of the wild ones are rather shocking to conventionalists, but you'll get used to them in time. You've got to! And they're only accidentals. The central fact in England to-day is the representation of the people for the first time in history by men who know their ideas, their way of life, their needs and their squalor, in mean streets and city slums. Legislation is no longer made by an aristocratic class with good intentions but divided from the seething masses by wide gulfs of caste, ignorance, and misunderstanding. The people, working through their Labour Party, are going to shape their own destiny."

"Very interesting," said Julian.

He wasn't in the least interested at the moment in the People, or any kind of destiny they might desire to shape. He was wondering no longer whether he would go downstairs and open the door to Evelyn, but how he could best slip away to do so without appearing discourteous to Henry Caffyn.

Stokes Prichard was in deep conversation with Francine Leigh and two other good-looking girls who seemed to be

amused with him. As usual he looked a marvellously beautiful object and was evidently enjoying himself. He was safe for hours.

Henry Caffyn was talking to the young German. His words rang out above the buzz of conversation.

"It's up to the youth of the world! They must get together and declare a crusade—a Holy War of the spirit—against the old cruelties of life, the old passions of national egotism, the old slogans of hate and ignorance. Would to God I were twenty years younger to take my place in the ranks!"

"You are one of our leaders, sir," said the young German. "Your words have reached as far as Germany. In our hearts—"

Julian edged away from Herbert Thorndyke, deliberately mixed himself up with a group of young men and women talking Art for all they were worth, and then by artful manœuvring worked his way towards the door. Two people were just entering, and created some stir. One was a tall, heavily-built man with a handsome, rugged face and a lock of white hair falling over his forehead. The other was a pretty woman in a black frock showing a long white neck and bare arms. Some one near Julian said, "The future Prime Minister." It was the leader of the Labour Party.

He never heard the name of the lady in the black frock, because he took advantage of her arrival to make a strategic retreat. He slipped downstairs as Big Ben boomed out the first strokes of ten o'clock.

He went into his own rooms, switched on the electric light, and glanced on the floor of the passage to see if Evelyn had put a card or any message through the letter-box. There was nothing there. In the sitting-room he lit a cigarette and noticed that his hand trembled. What a fool he had been to go to that show upstairs! Supposing Evelyn had come and gone? While those ridiculous idealists were talking nonsense about reforming the world and shaping the destiny of peoples, he had rotted up his chance of personal happiness and missed a supreme moment of life.

As he stood dejectedly in the centre of his room, there was a loud ring at the bell, followed by the rattle of the letter-box, as a friendly signal.

He rushed to the door and opened it. Outside was Evelyn Iffield, in a silk opera cloak, with a rose in her hair.

She smiled at him and held out both her hands.

"Hullo, Boy! Do I intrude?"

"Come in," he said.

XXXV

EVELYN was charmed with the combined rooms of Stokes Prichard and Julian. After throwing off her cloak she wandered around studying the prints on the walls, Prichard's photographs of pretty girls, and Julian's pewter pots which he had bought for decorative purposes in the Charing Cross Road. She admired the chintz-covered chairs and the view of London from the windows, with the lurid glare of light in the sky above Piccadilly.

"Perfectly topping!" she exclaimed. "How splendid to be in bachelor digs! Can I take a peep at the bedrooms, Julian?"

"Why not?" he asked, looking at her with a shy glance, overwhelmed by her presence and unable to speak more than the most commonplace things in words of one syllable.

He opened the bedroom doors for her, and she was amused and pleased by the daintiness of the rooms, and aghast in a comical way at the untidiness of Prichard's room, which was littered with clothes.

"What a Bolshevik! That boy is an artist in disorder."

The little kitchen enchanted her.

"Why not make some tea?" she asked. "I'd love to boil the kettle on that gas jet, and a cup of tea would be delectable after a dull dinner with medicated wine."

"Why not?" said Julian again. He watched her fill the kettle with water, light the gas ring, fetch cups and saucers from the cupboard over the sink. She was in an evening frock of some black gauzy stuff intertwined with silver flowers. She wore a pearl necklace, and that rose in her hair. He had never seen her looking so beautiful, he thought, and so mischievous. She had a dancing light in her eyes, and several times put her head on one side to look at him, with a teasing smile.

"You look older, Julian! You look as if you'd been growing in wisdom and knowledge."

"Journalism is apt to make one prematurely old," he said, advancing from words of one syllable. "Soon I'll be bald-headed."

She squealed with laughter at that.

"The Bald-headed Babe! The oldest head on the youngest shoulders. Portrait by *The Week's* special photographer."

"You still harp on my extreme juvenility," said Julian.

"Well, if that long word means youth," she answered, "there's no denying that you're still very young, Julian. If you were ten years older I might—"

"Might what?" he asked.

She hesitated, and laughed to herself.

"Well, I might be more of a nuisance to you than you would really like. Now here's a nice cup of tea, exquisitely made. Carry it into the next room, and I'll follow with the milk and sugar."

She sat in the chair where Janet had slept a few nights before. Julian thought of that, and the sudden reminder of that scene with his sister sent a little chill down his spine for a moment,

"Tell me things," said Evelyn. "How's *The Week?* What brilliant things have you written? What's it like to be a journalist?"

He did not answer those questions.

"I thought you had something to say to me," he said.

"Did you? Oh, I don't know. Tell me your news first."

She questioned him about Stokes Prichard, Clatworthy, whom she had met and liked on that night in Soho, his father and mother, whom she had not seen since the garden party at Gorse Hill. She did not mention Janet, he noticed, though she had been with her at the night club before Janet had gone to Cyril's rooms. He answered her questions briefly.

Stokes Prichard was rather amusing. Inclined to go off the deep end on the slightest provocation. Clatworthy's father was very ill. If he died Clatworthy would succeed to the title. A remarkable figure in the House of Lords! His

own father was always boxed up in his editorial room. They didn't see much of each other.

"Have you found out your mission in life?" asked Evelyn. "Are you going to do Great Things one day?"

She smiled at him with a little mockery over her tea cup.

"I've no desire that way," said Julian.

"Oh, yes, come now! I know you well enough to be certain that you're predestined to be very earnest and noble and high-souled. It's written in every line of your face, Julian. It's in the make-up of your brain. You were born with a conscience, and a delicate sense of right and wrong. You have an instinctive allegiance to the law of the spirit. I'm one of the natural rebels, and devoid of conscience, though occasionally discreet."

He was silent, wondering how long she was going to stay, and if she would spend her time evading the real issues between them. Perhaps it would be better if she did. It was good enough to see her there in his chair, to feel her presence in his room. She gave it a grace which it had not possessed before. It would be haunted by her when she went. He would see her sitting there, always.

"I'd like you to do big things one day," she said. "I'd like to feel, years hence, when I'm an old and wicked woman, with evil reputation, living in second class *pensions* at foreign watering places—'Do you see that old creature? She was the beautiful Evelyn Iffield of the early Georgian age!—'—that I once inspired the great leader with his first ambitions, taught him a little knowledge of life, and even played with his hand in my lap in chaste affection. You must admit, Julian, that our walks and talks together in Surrey were very innocent and spiritual. The very angels above must have been edified."

"To me," said Julian in a low voice, "they're unforgettable."

"Don't forget them!" said Evelyn. "Cherish the fragrance of them! I was your first romance, Julian, and while it lasted it was rather sweet. You owe me something for that!"

"You talk as if it had ended!" said Julian. "Is that inevitable?"

His voice trembled, boyishly, as he spoke.

Evelyn rose from her chair, and came and sat on the floor by his side with her head against his knees.

"Inevitable, after this evening," she said. "For one hour we can indulge in romance again—boy and girl comradeship —and forget the grim old world and its coarse realities, and revolting disillusions."

"Why only for an hour?" asked Julian. He wanted to say more than that, but courage failed him, and that other part of his brain, as it seemed, which warned him of precipices, and tremendous gulfs.

"Because," said Evelyn, "at the end of an hour I'm going, dear Julian, and as far as you and I are concerned it's the end of our adventure, and perhaps, if you feel like that, the end of our friendship!"

She spoke lightly, with her usual note of mockery, but Julian seemed to hear a faint undertone of sincerity and regret.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked. "What are you going to do—after this silly hour?"

"Oh, if you think it silly, I'll go now!" said Evelyn, pretending to be huffed.

"I mean silly because of its shortness," he explained. "And you haven't answered my question. Why should it be the end of all things—between you and me?"

She clasped her knees as she sat on the floor at his feet, and put her chin down to rest upon them.

"Because—" she said slowly, as if thinking it all out as she spoke, "because you are twenty, and I am twenty-six. Also because I like you too much, and respect you too much —your boyishness, Julian!—to spoil things for you. And lastly, but not leastly—is that correct, Mr. Balliol?—because I'm going to do something which is frightfully caddish, abominably wicked, and deceitful above all things."

She turned round and looked up into his face to see what effect her statement had made. Julian had gone a little pale. There was something in the tone of her voice which made

him believe that she was talking seriously, that she had some desperate plan in her mind, which was not good or pleasant.

"You're not chucking your husband, are you?" he asked huskily.

She seemed amused at his way of putting it.

"Yes," she answered, "to be quite honest, Julian, I must put it in the past tense. I've chucked him, this very night. At this very hour perhaps,"—she looked at a tiny gold wrist watch—"he has returned from his committee meeting of the golf club—Wednesday night—and is reading my letter of explanation. Such a chatty little letter! Explaining just why, nicely and kindly—but oh, so firmly."

"Why?" asked Julian in a low voice.

Evelyn shrugged her shoulders.

"All sorts of reasons. Very ordinary, rather squalid. His age and my youth. His mother, always in the house, watching, disapproving, suspishing, tale-telling, poisoning the wells of truth."

She sprang up and clasped her hands over her head, with a tragi-comical gesture.

"Oh, that old woman, Julian! How we hated each other! We lived, ate, walked and talked, with a deadly hate in our hearts for each other, which we hid under 'dearest mother,' and 'dearest Evelyn!' That's not good. It doesn't make for a healthy view of life. If I hadn't cleared out I might have been tempted to murder the old woman—put poison in her tea, or something! I wanted to play the game by Ted, but she made it impossible. Impossible! Just to get back on her, just to play with her suspicions and keep my sense of humour, I flirted around a bit with any handy boy in the neighbourhood—not you, Julian!—you were different! I wanted to play the game by Ted—poor old Ted! —but two things have broken me down. His mother, and his golf! Funny that! Funny to think that golf has wrecked poor old Ted's domestic bliss! But it's a fact, Julian! I daresay it's not the only marriage smashed to pieces with a niblick. What are wives going to do when their husbands spend their days walking round the links,

restrict their conversation to handicaps and the great adventure at the thirteenth hole, and dream of golf after dinner, in the big arm chair? That was Ted. 'Play a little Chopin, old girl!' Oh, yes, a soothing accompaniment to a pleasant snore, with the ecstatic vision of holing out in one! . . . Boredom, Julian! That's broken my moral strength. Devastating boredom in a country house with a mother-in-law. I warned him. I said, 'If you don't give up golf and take a house in town and leave dearest mother behind, there's going to be trouble 'twixt you and me, old boy!' When the scales of Fate were nicely balanced, dearest mother and the golf balls went down whop! I was sky high, light as a feather. Well, I'm quit of it. Ted and mother-in-law and ghost-haunted house. I'm free, Julian! A single lady for the nonce. Free as air, joyful in liberty, and out for adventure. That's me!"

She laughed down a high scale.

"What are your plans?" asked Julian. "Where do I come in?"

He was white to the lips. His mind was in a tumult of emotion, desire, and fear. Yes, he was conscious of fear.

She came round the table to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"This hour—it's slipping away," she said, smiling at him. "This is your hour, Julian. Make the most of it. After that I'm going to be very busy."

"Tell me," he said. "What are you going to do?"

She pulled out a little note from the bosom of her frock and held it above his head.

"I wrote three letters to-day," she said. "One to Ted, and one to you, and one to some one else. Quite a scribe! In yours you'll find some kind words, and a little confession. You mustn't read it now, but when I've gone, it will tell you something which may vex you a little. That's why I don't want to spoil this hour, because I don't want to make you in a bad temper. You look so sulky when you're vexed! So I'll just put it up here, over the mantelpiece. Next to Mr. Prichard's little actress girl. Two light-o'-

loves! Now, let's sit down and talk nicely. Like a good little boy and girl!"

She sat down, with her hands grasping the arms of the chintz-covered chair, and looked at him teasingly, and yet with a little pity and regret.

"I want to read that letter," he said. "I want to know. Now."

"No. That letter's private till I've gone. I put you on your honour, Julian. Good boy!"

Julian dropped his hand from the mantelpiece to which he had reached for the letter.

"Look here," he said, "I know you think I'm a kid. A boy, just out of school and all that. But I don't care a damn! Now that you've chucked Major Iffield, I want to say—"

She shook her head and spoke hurriedly.

"Don't say it, Julian! I know you love me with all the passion of your young romantic heart. You'd work for me! You'd be very good to me, if we went away together. Isn't that it, my dear? Yes, it would be splendid, if you were ten years older and I six years younger, and not twice married, and a thousand other things. I like you better than any other boy I've known. And that's why I'm here to-night, to give you a farewell kiss and then—good-bye!"

"No," he said, "I'm damned if I leave it like that. If you're going away with any one it's with me. . . Evelyn!"

He went towards her, and she rose from her chair, smiling, and a little pale. . . .

There was the sound of a key fumbling at the Yale lock. They both heard it, and Julian knew it was Stokes Prichard back early from the show upstairs.

Perhaps Evelyn guessed that it was Prichard coming in. She went quickly to Julian and held out her hands.

"Quick! That farewell kiss! Your last chance, Julian."

He took her hands and drew her close and kissed her on the lips with boyish passion.

They drew apart again, Evelyn humming a little tune and touching her coiled hair carelessly as Stokes Prichard came in.

He was amazed to see Evelyn there, as he had been to find Janet asleep in this room, some mornings ago.

"Excuse me," he said, "I'd no notion—"

Evelyn held out her hand.

"I'm Evelyn Iffield, one of Julian's friends. I expect you're Mr. Prichard, part owner of these exquisite rooms."

"Good, aren't they?" he said, shaking hands with her. "How do you like these chintz-covered chairs? My choice. Julian thinks they're loud!"

"Perfectly sweet," answered Evelyn. "I'm sorry I can't sit in one a moment longer. Who will take me to a taxi?"

"Oh, Lord!" said Stokes Prichard. "Must you go? For Heaven's sake stay a bit longer, and cheer up two benighted bachelors."

"Sorry. Engagements forbid! . . . Julian, that taxi!"

Prichard insisted on accompanying Evelyn and Julian to the street door where a crawling taxi halted at his signal.

"Well, good-bye, Julian. I'm glad I found you in. Good evening, Mr. Prichard."

She gave her hand to each in turn, and held Julian's a moment, tightly.

Then she went away in the taxi, waving a white glove at them.

"What a wonderfully beautiful person!" said Stokes Prichard, with his usual enthusiasm for pretty women. "Where have you been hiding her all this time?"

Julian muttered something about her living in the country, and was silent when Prichard narrated his adventures upstairs, and said that he had fled at the first opportunity, after being taken away from Francine Leigh who was a "peach" and introduced to a lady Bolshevik with eyes like gimlets—they bored into his backbone—and a mouth like a codfish.

While Prichard flung himself into the arm chair where Evelyn had been sitting, Julian took her letter down from the mantelpiece, and after a casual remark that he was "damn tired," went to his bedroom.

Standing by his dressing table, he tore open the envelope, sick with desire to know what Evelyn had written,

yet half afraid to read. It did not take long to read, though it covered four sheets in her big scrawling hand.

"Dear Julian,

"In case you are not in this evening when I come, I have written this to slip through your letter-box. I have left poor old Ted at last. The situation became impossible. To-morrow morning I am crossing over to France with a mutual friend of ours with whom I am going to live until we fail to amuse each other. That's Cyril, whom you detest so much. He was always a good friend of mine, and we have discovered lately that we laugh at the same jokes. He also pretends—with passionate insincerity—that I am the only woman he has ever loved, and I agree to believe it. Of course it will end in tragedy—these things do—but meanwhile I shall get some fun out of it, I hope. Anyhow, it's an escape from the mother-in-law, and the intolerable boredom of poor old Ted. You will be shocked. So you ought to be, dear Julian! It's not a nice thing to do. I know you love me with a boyish adoration. I liked to see that little flame in your eyes, and to feel your hand tremble when I touched it. It was so nice to be loved like that! But you see I've been twice married, and I'm ever so old in the knowledge of evil, and I couldn't spoil your young life by letting you be foolish with me. That may count unto me for righteousness, hereafter! Well, Julian, that's that. I shall watch your career from afar. I shall rejoice one day when you marry a nice girl, without a mother-in-law, I hope. Don't play golf in your middle age. And remember, with forgiveness and a little pity, and the mild tenderness of a romantic episode,

"Your affectionate friend,

"Evelyn I."

"P.S. I'm sorry about Janet. But Cyril wasn't good enough for her, and she was too much of a baby for him. I'm saving her from disillusion."

Julian let the letter slip from his hands to the floor. He was white to the lips, and there was a look of horror in his eyes. She was going off with Cyril Buckland—that blackguard who had broken his sister's heart.

He gave a kind of strangled groan, raising his hands above his head as though crying out to the God in whom he did not believe.

"What's the matter?" asked Prichard, from the next room.

"Nothing," said Julian.

XXXVI

AFTER a night of wakefulness, Julian went to the office as usual, with one resolution which was the only definite result of long hours of agonising thought which had been very wild at times. He was going to resign his job on *The Week*. It was impossible to accept wages from a man whose son had behaved like a brute to Janet and now was on his way to drag Evelyn Iffield to the level of his own beastliness.

Since the morning of that scene with his sister, Julian had decided to throw up his job. He had delayed only because his pledge of secrecy to Janet made it difficult to face his father with a plausible excuse for clearing out. In any case he would have done so. His conversation with Burton and Dickson, and his own experience, had convinced him that the game of journalism as played on *The Week* was a degradation from which he must find some way of escape before its dirt soaked into his soul. There were other papers in Fleet Street, not as low as that. He might try for a job on one. . . . Anyhow he had made up his mind to face his father with the truth about *The Week* as it appeared to his own staff—and to his own son. Surely to God there was time even for his father to escape from its poisonous influence and from that old devil to whom he had sold himself. . . . Now he would have to say something about Cyril. He could do so without giving Janet away. He would tell his father plainly that Cyril had left Janet in the lurch and had run off with Evelyn Iffield, leaving Janet with a broken heart. Surely it would be impossible for his father to go on working for a man whose son had done that. He would be lost to all sense of honour if he ignored such an outrage.

In that night of wakefulness Julian had faced up to realities. In tears and in agony he had grown older in this hour

of bitterness, and had stared at aspects of truth about himself and life. Evelyn's letter had scorched him. His horror at it was because she had gone off with Cyril. That had filled him with overwhelming disgust. But gradually this disgust included himself. He had been ready to play the Cyril game. If he had been a few years older Evelyn would have been willing to play it with him. He had no claim to virtuous indignation, and yet he loathed the idea of Evelyn doing this thing. Didn't that prove the hypocrite in him? Yes, he had been a hypocritical young swine, playing with the idea of immorality though all his decent instincts, and any code he had, were on the side of moral law. The vision of Major Iffield came to him—that dull, simple man faced by this tragedy, crumpled up by it. What about *his* agony, for the wife he had loved? At this very time he would be suffering torture. Julian pitied him, and was glad in a way that he had not been the cause of that man's bleeding heart.

Some wild schemes of preventing Evelyn from doing this thing had leapt to his mind. But he had no knowledge of her whereabouts. She had not given any hint of her address. He might go down to Gorse Hill—motor down—and see Major Iffield. He was not likely to be asleep that night! Yes, he would do that! . . .

He went out of his rooms—stealing out so as not to wake Prichard—as far as the garage where he kept his car. But the place was shut up and in darkness. In any case what was the use? Probably Evelyn had already crossed the Channel. She had timed her visit to get the boat train from Charing Cross. It was obvious. She had gone straight from his rooms to the station, where Cyril was waiting for her. He raged at the thought, and had a kind of brain storm. . . . What should he do? What, in God's name, could he do? . . . He went to Charing Cross station and asked a porter whether he had seen a tall lady—young and good-looking—in evening dress, catching the boat train. The man jeered at him, and said, "Do you think I remember 'em all? Joking, aren't you? Pretty or plain, they're all the same to me—a damn nuisance."

In a telephone box Julian tried to ring up Major Iffield. The exchange was closed. At least he could get no answer from Gorse Hill. In any case he had come out without money, so that if the call had been answered, he could not have paid. Outside the telephone box he cursed his fate, and attracted the unfavourable notice of a Charing Cross policeman.

"Now then, young fellow, what's *your* trouble?"

He had a mad idea of confiding his trouble to this young policeman. Perhaps Scotland Yard might help. He stammered out something about a lady he wanted to find, but the policeman was unsympathetic.

"If you take my advice, young fellow, you'll go home to your Ma!"

He went home to his rooms again, creeping in as he had crept out. There was nothing he could do. . . . He wondered vaguely and foolishly if prayer might be any good. A prayer to The Unknown God to save Evelyn from Cyril?

"Oh, God!" he whispered. "Oh, God! If You have any pity for women—"

There were fellows who prayed and believed in miracles! Only a miracle could help her now, some kind of Power stretched out to catch Cyril by the throat and choke him—the beast.

He had spoilt Janet's life. Now he was going to spoil Evelyn's. Brother and sister had both been broken by this vile cub of an infamous father. Victor Buckland's son! Cyril had confessed to bad blood. The Old Man was poisoning English life. His son was spreading the poison in private lives. And Victor Buckland's money was the price of the Perryam dishonour, father, son, daughter. The two skunks! . . .

Julian felt hatred like a flame in his brain. He desired to kill Cyril. It would be pleasant to bash him. Exceedingly good to rid the earth of such an animal. . . . Then hatred passed from him at the thought of his own weakness and passion. Cyril was not much worse than himself. Perhaps nothing worse, but only a little older, and more cynical, and less of a hypocrite. Evelyn was "amused" by him,

though she saw that the affair would end in tragedy. "They always do." There was a great pity in his heart for Evelyn, and a greater pity for himself. And after pity came anger, and after anger, a renewal of all his agony, self-contempt, disgust, misery, until, in the morning, he was hollow-eyed, and frightened Stokes Prichard at the breakfast table.

"I'm afraid you're sickening for something, old man," said Prichard. "Anything but mumps! It's horribly catching, and I'd hate to have my beauty spoilt before your sister Janet comes to tea."

Julian felt weak, washed-out, and entirely unemotional, having exhausted emotion, when he walked up to the office to see his father and resign his job.

In the office of *The Week* Julian was vaguely aware of some suppressed excitement among the staff. Behind the counter three of the girl clerks and one of the men clerks had their heads together over some paper. When he walked past them they seemed to have a guilty look, and hurriedly dispersed, while one of the girls hid the paper under a ledger. Why? He couldn't imagine. He wasn't the business manager, peeved if these people wasted their time.

Upstairs in the editorial department Horace Burton's lady secretary was talking with one of the typists. They too had their heads together over some paper the size of the *Spectator,* and when he entered the room drew apart hurriedly and thrust the paper on one side.

"Is Mr. Burton in?" asked Julian, again wondering vaguely what was the news which seemed to excite the staff, and why they hid the paper they were reading as soon as he appeared.

He found Horace Burton sitting forward at his desk, utterly absorbed in a page of the same sized paper, which looked like the *Spectator.* He was smiling to himself in his sardonic way and said "Put it down" without looking up, and obviously mistaking Julian for the office boy with a proof.

"Good morning," said Julian gloomily. "Any news?"

Burton jerked his head up and said, "Oh!" and then gave Julian a curious searching look.

"See this?" he asked, pushing across the paper. It was a copy of *Verity,* dog's-eared at a page bearing the title:

"THE WEEK DEFRAUDS THE BRITISH PUBLIC."

Underneath in bold letters was the subtitle:

"BOGUS SCHEME OF VICTORY BOND PRIZES:
MR. VICTOR BUCKLAND DEFIES THE LAW."

It was signed by a name familiar to Julian and to most people in England—Henry Caffyn.

Julian glanced down the page, while Horace Burton watched him curiously. The article seemed to be a scathing attack on the Old Man in connection with his new scheme of Victory Bond Prizes. There were a lot of figures which Julian couldn't follow. They seemed to make out a charge of fraud on the people who subscribed to the scheme. He read some words in the concluding paragraph.

"For years this man, Victor Buckland, has posed as a patriot and public philanthropist while raising the circulation of his paper and acquiring great personal wealth by methods of money prizes and financial advice which have been fraudulent in effect, though technically perhaps within the law. In several cases where the law intervened, Mr. Buckland's mastery of legal niceties and his flamboyant oratory with ignorant juries enabled him to secure a verdict in his favour. In spite of the flagrant dishonesty of the Widow's Pension Fund, the law has shown itself to be strangely timid in directing its attention to Mr. Buckland's activities. There is no longer any excuse for such inaction. Here is a case of common and deliberate fraud which would instantly cause the arrest of any man less protected by political friends and by sinister influence in high quarters. If there is no legal enquiry into this scheme for obtaining public money under false pretences, England will understand that her Courts of Justice have betrayed their duty and their tradition. Mr. John Perryam, editor of *The Week,* may or may not be associated with his proprietor in this conspiracy, but his honour as a journalist is deeply at stake."

Julian read these paragraphs slowly, and without excitement. Only the mention of his father's name caused him a momentary alarm.

"What does it all mean?" he asked, coldly. "Is it serious at all?"

Horace Burton was sitting back in his swing chair, tapping his front teeth with a penholder, playing a little tune on them.

"Not pleasant," he said. "Rather damn serious for the Old Man. He's got to answer this—and it will take a lot of answering."

"What about my father?" asked Julian.

Horace Burton smiled rather doubtfully.

"Well, that's a point too! What about your father? Whether he's legally involved or not I can't say. I hope not, old man, for your sake, and his."

He laughed harshly, after a moment's silence.

"All the fat's in the fire, anyhow! It may be the end of the jolly old *Week!* On the street again, for all of us."

His voice broke a little.

"Hard luck on the little wife, if it comes to that! The third time!"

He left his chair and strode up and down the room, excited and alarmed, yet—Julian thought—finding some cynical pleasure in this attack on his Chief.

"Of course the law will have to act. It can't ignore this—over the signature of a man like Caffyn. It puts the Old Man into a cleft stick. Either he's got to sue Caffyn for libel or acknowledge the charge. If there's a libel action and he loses, the Public Prosecutor will have to get busy. Well, I shan't shed any tears. I've been expecting it. It was bound to happen, and the biggest old hypocrite in England will be brought to book at last. A good thing for England!"

"You seem to assume the charges can be upheld," said Julian. For the first time he was beginning to feel scared.

"There's not a doubt about it," said Burton. "Those facts and figures speak for themselves. How that fellow Caffyn got hold of them I can't imagine. But he's got the Old Man. Got him all ends up! And he won't leave go. There are more articles to follow. 'To be continued.' A very nice serial story!"

He laughed again, and played another little tune on his teeth with the end of his penholder. Then he suddenly swung round to Julian, and spoke with an unusual emotion.

"It'll be a damned shame if your father gets dragged into it. He's never interested himself in the Old Man's financial schemes. Doesn't understand figures any more than a babe, or old Balfour! He's a gentleman, and there's not a fellow on the staff who hasn't a good word for him. I will say that!"

"Very kind of you!" said Julian, with a touch of sarcasm. But his voice was not quite steady. Gradually a sense of fear was creeping over him. At first he had not realised the gravity of this business. Now—if Burton were not exaggerating—it looked as though his father's name and honour might be in danger. Perhaps even more than that. . . . Supposing the law were to take action against his father, as Editor, as well as against the Old Man? . . . Julian thrust the thought away from him. It was preposterous and unbelievable. His father, so timid, and shrinking, and sensitive, the most honest and upright man alive, involved in a charge of conspiracy to defraud the public! The thing was too hideously absurd.

He went up to Mr. Perryam's room, and noticed that even the messenger boys outside were reading the article in *Verity*. They winked at each other, as Julian passed and tapped at the Editor's door. As there was no answer he opened the door and went inside. His father was seated at his table at the far end of the room—a handsome room panelled in oak and furnished in the Jacobean style. Above the fireplace, elaborately carved in imitation of Grinling Gibbons, was a copy of the portrait of Victor Buckland which Julian had seen at the Old Man's house at Hindhead. He seemed to be looking down on his editor with a bland, patronising smile.

Two other men were in the room—Mr. Birch, the Business Manager, a stout, middle-aged man, wearing a white waistcoat under his frock coat, and a legal-looking man unknown to Julian.

Julian's father was speaking as he entered, in an emotional tone.

"You know all about this scheme, Birch. Why try to keep the truth from me? Is it illegal, or is it not?"

The Business Manager was breathing heavily. He put his plump finger inside his collar as though it were too tight for him.

"The Governor controls all these schemes himself, as you well know. I had my suspicions, I confess. I warned him from the beginning."

"Why didn't you warn me?" asked Mr. Perryam sharply. "I'm supposed to be the Editor of this paper. But as far as the business side goes, I'm kept completely in the dark. I know no more of finance than a babe unborn."

"That's why I didn't discuss it with you," said the Business Manager, sullenly.

"I didn't want you to discuss it with me. But I expect a little loyalty from my staff. A little common honesty, anyhow. You, above all men, Birch, ought to have given me a hint—a danger signal. It was my influence that brought you here, for old times' sake."

"I wish to Heaven you hadn't!" said the Business Manager, in a low voice. "I've never known a moment's peace since the Old Man put me into this position."

"We'd better get down to the facts," said the legal-looking man quietly. "I suppose the books are in order?"

"I doubt it," said the Business Manager. "The Chief has a peculiar system of bookkeeping. Besides, we've been snowed under."

The lawyer stroked his jaw.

"I don't like the look of things," he said.

It was then that Mr. Perryam saw his son standing at the door.

"Hullo, Julian," he said quietly. "Come in. You know Mr. Birch?"

"Yes," said Julian.

Mr. Birch said "Good morning," with forced geniality, gathered up some papers,, and glanced at the lawyer.

"We may as well go round to the Temple."

The other man nodded.

"Yes—we'll have a talk with Tasker. He's the best man in a case like this."

Julian was left alone with his father.

XXXVII

MR. PERRYAM sat staring at his table, and Julian noticed that he had a grey look, and that his hand trembled as he touched some papers and moved them away from his blotting-pad.

"What's the meaning of it all?" asked Julian. "That article in *Verity?*"

Mr. Perryam gave a groan.

"It means that I shall find myself in Queer Street if I'm not careful. Perhaps if I *am* careful!"

Mr. Perryam rose from his chair and paced up and down the room.

"I've never understood the financial side of the paper," he said. "I've never taken any interest or share in any of the Old Man's gambling adventures. I'd like you to know that, Julian, in case anything happens."

He went to the window and looked down into the street where the news carts were waiting for the next issue of *The Week,* published that day. Then he paced back to his table, fingering his brass inkstand.

"For ten years I've sat in this room," he said. "When I first entered it as editor, it seemed that I'd reached the top of the ladder. I was proud of those panelled walls and that carved mantelpiece, and those oak chairs—sham antique! They were the outward and visible signs of Success. It seemed a great thing to run a paper with a circulation of a million and a half. A great game! Also it meant a salary of three thousand a year, with a five years' contract, after poverty, struggle, insecurity of tenure, the ups and downs of Fleet Street. It meant that house at Gorse Hill, the means of sending you to Winchester and then to Oxford, a good education for Janet, a little luxury for your mother, poor darling. I was pleased with myself when I first sat in this chair, with a sense of power—and a sense

of humour. Oh, I had a great sense of humour at first! It amused me to arrange sensational 'scoops,' to reveal the latest scandal, sometimes to remedy some horrible abuse, or unmask some pestilential scoundrel. We did a bit of good now and then! It seemed a tremendous lark—a great adventure—in the early days. Old friends in Fleet Street envied me. 'That fellow Perryam has done pretty well for himself!' So I thought for a time. . . . Until this room became my prison house!"

Mr. Perryam glanced round the room with a look of loathing.

"The prison house of my soul, old boy!" he said, in a broken voice. "I can see that now. For the sake of Success I sold myself to that old ruffian. You were quite right when you said I was a bought man. It hurt me at the time. . . . To keep my job and carry out his policy—according to contract!—I've compromised with truth, pandered to the mob instinct, sunk my own ideals and convictions, turned a blind eye to the corrupt and sinister schemes of the man who paid me as his hireling and his bond slave."

Mr. Perryam seemed to forget the presence of his son. He talked as though thinking aloud, with his hands behind his back and his head bent.

"It was the war killed my sense of humour. Jack's death, and all that. It made me see how low this game was, how vile! Since then I've been tortured, conscience-stricken—and trying to keep a bright face at home!"

He turned round and stared up at the big portrait of Victor Buckland.

"That man!" he said in a low voice. "How he has dragged me down. How he has degraded me! As low as the dirt!"

He remembered Julian again, and his face flushed a little, and he breathed heavily.

"I ought never to have allowed you to come into this place, old boy. With so many sinister swine walking about its passages—the Old Man's tools and hirelings—on the business side. Well, I never had anything to do with all that. The editorial side was utterly divorced from the

financial department. I've clean hands in that way, anyhow."

Julian rose from his chair and faced his father, white-faced.

"Look here, father! You had better clear out while there's time. Resign your job before the trouble breaks."

Mr. Perryam shook his head.

"It means abject poverty if I do! The end of Gorse Hill and your mother's happiness, and Janet's prospects."

"Better than a case in the Law Courts," said Julian.

Mr. Perryam turned as white as Julian.

"I don't think it will come to that. I hope not."

"Besides," said Julian, "you can get another job, on a better paper. *The Times?*"

Mr. Perryam laughed uneasily.

"Not a chance, old boy. I'm tarred with the Old Man's brush. And anyhow Fleet Street is choked with out-of-work editors. If I leave *The Week* I'm done. Finished."

"I'm leaving it anyhow," said Julian. "To-day. I'd rather starve to death than work another hour for these Buckland swine."

He spoke with suppressed passion which only blazed in his eyes.

Mr. Perryam stared at him gloomily.

"That only means that I shall have to keep you. It will only add to my burden and worry."

Julian exploded with rage and indignation.

"Don't you understand, father? Every day you stay on here you're sinking neck deep in mud. I always thought you were a man of honour! An Idealist and all that. Why! for years you've been living on muck! This garbage of the gutter press! How can I have any respect for you, now I've found out what it all means? One can't shovel it all on to old Buckland. You've been his right-hand man, and played up to him. You've carried out his policy and done his dirty work."

Mr. Perryam breathed heavily and his face flushed scarlet and then paled so that his skin was grey.

He spoke in a broken way, miserably, without anger.

"I'm sorry you feel like that, old boy! No respect for me, eh? After all my love for you—my devotion."

"You've got to throw up this job," said Julian. "There's another reason. Cyril Buckland has chucked Janet—after playing about with her—like the damned cad he is!"

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Perryam, harshly. He had a look of great fear in his eyes, as he rose from his chair unsteadily. "Julian! . . . In God's name, old boy! . . . What's this about Janet?"

Julian was smitten with a pang of pity for his father. He had idolised Janet, spoilt her from babyhood. If she sneezed he worried about her health. If she asked for the moon, he would try and get it for her.

Julian softened the blow a little.

"She'll get over it all right. She's only a kid. But she was pretty far gone on Cyril—thought all the world of him. Now he's chucked her. He's run away with Evelyn Iffield. Last night."

"With Major Iffield's wife?"

Mr. Perryam stared at Julian, whose eyes dropped beneath his father's gaze. He remembered that his father knew of his own episode with Evelyn.

Mr. Perryam said, "Good God! Good God!"

Then he turned to his son and spoke in a tone of tragic reproach.

"You and Janet have been hiding things from me. What do I know of you both? You've made a stranger of me, though I've been a good father to you, whatever you think of my work. Your mother and I agonised over your slightest illness, worried if you lost appetite a little, denied ourselves in every way to give you any happiness. And with what reward? You've kept your own secrets, arranged your own pleasures—without us—gone on adventures which we could only guess at vaguely, with anxiety and fear. I hated to be an old-fashioned disciplinarian. It seemed out of keeping with the spirit of modern youth. I was easy-going, though full of doubts and anxieties when Janet stayed out late, ran up to town to unknown friends,

came back without telling a word about her doings. I heard rumours of you and Major Iffield's wife. . . . What could I say? You never came to me for a word of advice or help. You would have resented the slightest hint, angrily. So I kept quiet. I didn't approve of Cyril hanging about Janet. I didn't like the fellow, and was very anxious. I spoke to your mother about it, and she pooh-poohed my alarm. I spoke to Janet one day, and she laughed at me and then was rude and hurt me horribly. Now you tell me things that make my blood run cold. And I don't know how much you're still hiding from me. . . . What about Janet? Is she all right? . . . If I knew that anything had happened to her—anything worse than what you've told me—"

He put his hand against his side with a kind of convulsive gesture and said in a loud voice,

"By God, Julian! . . . I couldn't bear it! I couldn't bear it!"

Julian answered him coldly, masking his own emotion.

"There's nothing more to know, father. Janet will be heartbroken for a little while. But it won't last long. This breaking of hearts is all bunk, I'm told."

He spoke with bitter sarcasm, feeling that his own heart was broken and his own life smashed because of Evelyn, but putting up a good pretence of callousness. Then he returned to his argument, his *idée fixe*.

"All the same, it's another reason for chucking old Buckland. You can't go on after this."

Mr. Perryam suddenly flamed out with anger.

"Why not? What has his son's ill conduct got to do with him? Do you think he has any more control over Cyril than I over you? Are the fathers to be made responsible for the sins of their sons? Do you think it will please the Old Man to know that his young blackguard has run off with another man's wife? Vile as he is, his home life has been honest, and he doted on that boy of his."

"The animals dote on their young," said Julian. "Even tigers and apes. It's the law of nature. But there's an-

other law, and if old Buckland isn't careful he's going to get lagged. Father, I implore you to cut your connection with that old ruffian. Before it's too late."

Mr. Perryam was silent. Julian could hear his father's hard breathing, as he stood by his desk, fumbling with some papers in his basket.

"There's such a thing as loyalty," he said, after a long pause. "Honour, even in dishonour. I've shared his success. If he gets into trouble, I'll share his trouble."

Julian looked at his father's face, and saw the line of his lips harden with obstinate resolve.

"What about us?" asked Julian. "The mater—and our name?"

"We must all face up to it," said Mr. Perryam. "In any case I've got to keep you all, and without this job there's nothing doing!"

Julian went towards the door, and stood there hesitating, while his father sat at his desk again, heavily.

"Well," said Julian, "I've finished with the Buckland family. I'm off."

"That's all right," said Mr. Perryam. "Let me know your plans—if you have any."

"I haven't," said Julian, "but I'll look round for some."

"Good!" said Mr. Perryam with a hint of sarcasm.

Outside the door Julian saw the Old Man coming up the stairs. His heavy figure looked enormous in a big motor coat lined with fur. His puffed eyes glanced at Julian without recognition and he passed without a word towards the Editor's room. He had a worried look, and his usual air of bland pomposity had passed from him.

XXXVIII

ON the evening of his resignation from *The Week* Julian went one flight above his own rooms—Stokes Prichard had gone out to dinner again—and knocked at Henry Caffyn's door.

Neither to Burton nor to his father had he mentioned his friendship with this man who had opened such a ferocious attack upon Victor Buckland and the paper. His habitual reserve had kept him silent on that point, but at the back of his mind was the thought that he might save his father's reputation—at least exercise some useful influence—by some sort of plea to Caffyn. It was an unpleasant task and horribly humiliating, but the picture of his father's tragic eyes haunted Julian, and bade him face the ordeal. For the mater's sake, too! It would be an infernal tragedy to her if this business led to the downfall of *The Week* and the family fortunes. To be thrust back into poverty again—the Brixton Road!—after all her struggle, and that early squalor. . . .

Julian felt the sweat on his forehead outside Henry Caffyn's door. His nerves were all jangled by the abominable happenings of the last few days—Janet, Evelyn—now this danger to his father and all of them!

The door was opened by Henry Caffyn himself. He was in the old velvet jacket which he wore as a rule after dinner, and he was holding one of his team of pipes which hung in a rack over his mantelpiece. His eyes lighted up when he saw Julian.

"Hullo, young fellow! Come for a yarn with the old man? That's fine! Come in and make yourself at home."

Julian went into his room, walled in by books of all shapes and sizes, except where a few engravings hung. On the mantelpiece was the portrait of a boy in khaki with a little lamp burning a red light below it. A great bowl of roses

was on the table where Caffyn had been writing—the ink was wet on his writing pad—and the room was fragrant with their scent.

"William Allen Richardson," said Henry Caffyn, touching one of the roses tenderly. "Sent me by a lovely lady, dear heart!"

He held out a tobacco jar and said, "Help yourself," but Julian disappointed him by lighting a cigarette.

"I'm having the devil of a time with my book on 'The Chance of Youth,'" he said, with a rueful glance at his manuscript. "I believe it's all wrong from beginning to end! Your little friend Audrey Nye gave me a frightful knock by a chance remark she made. Said, 'the Young Idea is only the old idea with a new kind of slang!' My word, that was a body blow to my philosophy."

Julian was silent, so silent that presently, after various discursive remarks, Henry Caffyn glanced at him with a humorous smile and said, "Understudying Hamlet, young fellow? Or is the tailor pressing for his little account? If a small loan is any use to you—"

Julian unburdened himself. It was not easy, in spite of this man's kindness and geniality.

"Look here, sir," he said, awkwardly, "I've come to consult you about a private matter. It's rather important—and damnable."

"No trouble with a lady, I hope?" asked Henry Caffyn, good-humouredly.

Julian reflected miserably that there was trouble with a lady, but Henry Caffyn could not help him there.

"A business matter," he said. "The fact is that I'm the son of John Perryam, Editor of *The Week*."

Henry Caffyn gave a little low whistle and said, "The devil you are!" Then he gave a quick searching glance at Julian and said, "That's not your fault!"

"No," said Julian. "But I happen to like my father—he's been all that's decent—and I rather fancy your attack in *Verity* is going to knock him edgewise."

Henry Caffyn wiped the bowl of his pipe carefully on the side of his nose so that it shone with a new polish.

"I'm not out for your father particularly," he said. "I've heard good things about him. I'm after Old Man Buckland . . . and I mean to get him this time."

"It will drag my father down," said Julian. "That's inevitable if you get the Old Man."

Henry Caffyn polished his pipe on the other side of his nose.

"Yes, I suppose so. . . . I'm sorry for your sake, laddie. Fathers are a bit of a nuisance sometimes."

Julian looked up at this white-haired man with the pointed beard—so like Don Quixote, so noble and gallant-looking, and kind.

"I suppose you must go on? Is it worth while, do you think? It will be rather rough if you destroy my father —and the whole crowd of us—in order to get at a rotten old skunk."

Henry Caffyn sprang up from his chair and his grey eyes were intensely alight.

"I shall certainly go on. And I do think it's worth while. And I can't help it if your father gets caught in the same trap. If it were my own father, I should go on, week by week, piling libel on libel, until that old scoundrel Buckland sues me or gets the hand of the law on his shoulder. I'm out for him. I'll never leave go until I've nobbled him."

"What's your quarrel with him?" asked Julian.

Henry Caffyn stroked his pointed beard with nervous fingers, and laughed a little.

"I hate him like hell!" he said. "Not that I've ever met him or cast eye on him. There's nothing personal in my hate, I can assure you. But to me he's the symbol, the arch-type of all that's brutal, corrupt, and vile in English life to-day. What's the good of trying to give a lead to the people—poor, ignorant, well-meaning, deluded people—when that man poisons the wells of truth with his lying pen, and stirs up the muddy dregs of human nature with his evil genius? He must be got out of the way before idealism gets a chance. What's the use of trying to get peace into this war-fevered world when that man, week by

week, insults friendly nations, enrages unfriendly nations, and stokes up the old hell fires? I leave out of account the other side of the paper, all that divorce stuff, all that disgusting sex stuff. I take no notice of that."

He waved his hand as though rejecting an obscene object.

"What I will not tolerate is this man's deliberate and persistent policy of international hate, his appeal to the cruelties that lurk in every human heart, the devilish promptings of racial enmity. That paper of his has a circulation of something like two millions, and it's read by three times that number. It's the most terrific organ of opinion that gets to the Mob Mind in this country, and the poor bloody Mob is fed on that carrion week by week, so that its eyes are blinded to truth and its ears deaf to all reasonable and ennobling words. Men like me who are struggling to kill the war spirit, and to raise humanity a little higher than the ape, can't compete with the forces against us when they're captured and controlled by that horrible Old Man with his false bonhomie, his false patriotism, his false love of sport and outdoor life, his false defence of popular liberties, his blasphemous hypocrisy."

Julian was silent. He could put up no defence for Victor Buckland. He agreed with every word spoken by this passionate crusader. But he thought of his father, the right-hand man of Victor Buckland, and was stricken with the thought.

Henry Caffyn spoke more quietly.

"I have one personal reason for intending to destroy him, though I said otherwise. Do you see that portrait on the mantelpiece? Not a bad looking boy, eh? A brilliant chap, and the pride of my life. My son, Perryam, killed on the Somme, in '17. One day I'll let you read his letters from the Front, if they wouldn't bore you. Good letters, which used to make me weep out of silly old eyes. He believed he was fighting for great ideals—the death of militarism, the defence of civilisation and Christendom. He had a spiritual love for England, and for all that England means in honour and fair play and decency. Willingly he offered

up his life for all that. . . . And when he was killed, I dedicated my rotten old life, any power I have in my pen, my immortal soul, to help forward his ideals, which were shared by the best of the youth that died, in their simple, inarticulate, instinctive way. That man Buckland has thwarted me, and all of us. He has betrayed the dead. He is infecting the living with his pestilential breath. I've marked him down, and will not rest until I've put him out of harm's way."

He paced up and down the room, not looking at Julian, speaking rapidly, in a low voice.

"He has great friends. They will try to save him. They've hobnobbed with him, taken his racing tips, got involved in his financial deals, applauded him in public as a great patriot. They'll be frightened of their own names and skins. They'll be scared of the great show-up. Well, to hell with them all! I'll fight the whole crowd of them until either this man is broken or I'm broken. And I don't think it's going to be me! Presently these friends of his will begin to run like rats. They'll be the first to disown him. They'll join the hounds. I know 'em!"

He was silent after that, and lit his pipe again, and glanced once or twice at Julian who sat staring at the floor.

"Meanwhile," said Julian, presently, "I'm out of a job."

He explained that he had left *The Week* and had tried to persuade his father to leave it.

Henry Caffyn was startled by that news. He had not realised that Julian had worked for the paper.

"Your father ought to take your advice," he said. "He'd do well to follow your example, young fellow."

"He believes in loyalty," said Julian. "Honour in dishonour, and all that."

"Fudge!" said Henry Caffyn.

He was thoughtful and silent again, stroking his old pipe with his thin, nervous fingers.

"Look here. If you're out of a job—"

He went to his table and shifted the bowl of roses and wrote a letter in a dashing hand.

It was an introduction for Julian to the London editor of an American newspaper.

"He's rather taken with my idea for an International League of Youth! Anyhow, he's a good chap and keen on 'uplift' as he calls it. He was asking me the other day for a bright young fellow who could do English Sport for the American Press. Any good to you?"

"Lots of good," said Julian.

"Clean stuff," said Henry Caffyn. "No harm in it anyhow."

He put his hand on Julian's shoulder.

"Don't you worry about your father. I'm told he's kept clear of the Old Man's finance. And I'll help you all I know. Anything to rescue a young soul from that sink of iniquity! Have a drink?"

Julian had a drink, and felt a little comforted.

XXXIX

MRS. PERRYAM came up to town with Janet and had tea in her son's rooms. The presence of Stokes Prichard, who had asked for the afternoon off from his office in order to grace the occasion with his presence, helped Julian a good deal, because it kept the conversation away from realities and enforced a social pretence that everything was merry and bright, with nothing more serious in life than the burning of the tea-cakes by Prichard who miscalculated the heat of the little gas oven.

Prichard was thoroughly pleased with himself, apart from that regrettable incident, and did not suspect for a moment that the beauty of his new lounge suit, the amiability of his conversation, and the gallantry of his manners were somewhat wasted on these people whose nerves were on edge with private tragedy. Not altogether wasted, perhaps. This boy with the crinkly hair was so gay and so thoroughly satisfied with life and himself that it was impossible not to play up a little to his "parlour tricks," as Julian called them, and to feel a little reflected warmth from the sunshine of his presence. Mrs. Perryam and Janet seemed to feel that, though Julian had difficulty in concealing his gloom. They were both marvellous, he thought,—especially Janet, whom he had not seen since that morning when she had sat in this room in a state of moral and mental collapse. She looked ill and weak to the searching glance he gave her, and there was something about her eyes which made him believe that she had been weeping a good deal, but she responded to Prichard's gallantries with a spirit which was rather shocking to Julian, who was tempted to think that she was a heartless little hussy and not worth all the worry he had given her. Did she know about Cyril's flight with Evelyn? He had not written to her with that news, afraid of dealing such a mortal blow

to her pride. But they must know now at Gorse Hill. The whole neighbourhood would be whispering about Evelyn Iffield's desertion of her husband. His father would have told his mother about Cyril. It was almost certain that his mother had told Janet. Yet there they were, both of them, talking and laughing with young Prichard as though there were no skeletons in the family cupboard. He watched his mother. She was very smart in her town-going clothes—adorably good-looking, as usual, with a playful smile in her eyes as she poured out the tea and chaffed Prichard because of his forgetful behaviour with the tea-cakes. "Like Alfred!" she said, inevitably, but with a jolly laugh that enriched the stale old joke. She thought the rooms were "frightfully quaint," and told Prichard and Julian that they were jolly lucky to have such sumptuous apartments.

"Why, when I was first married, with Julian as a baby, we had smaller rooms than these in the wilds of Brixton! You modern young people begin at the wrong end of life—luxury first. You're spoilt—the whole crowd of you!"

Did she know—did she realise—that the family fortunes were in jeopardy and that in a little while, if Victor Buckland went down with *The Week,* all her little luxuries at Gorse Hill, the very flowers in her garden which she worshipped, would have to be left for the miserable squalor of some cheap suburb as bad as Brixton or worse? She did not reveal the thought of such a gloomy prospect by the flicker of an eyelid. She looked perfectly secure, serene and gay. Julian felt disconcerted, angry, and irritable, because of this laughing indifference to his father's fate, Janet's unhappiness, and his own heart-break. She didn't care a damn! She refused to take a serious view of things. . . .

"Let's have a look at your bedroom, Julian," she said presently. "I'll bet it's shamefully untidy, unless your old woman is able to create order out of chaos."

Janet was sitting next to Stokes Prichard with an album of snap-shots between them—mostly Oxford scenes with Julian in the pictures.

"Perfectly tidy, mother," said Julian.

She went into his room, and without one glance at it, shut the door quietly behind her, while all the mirth went out of her eyes.

"Julian!" she said in a low voice. "My poor boy! What dreadful things have been happening!"

"Which things?" he asked. "There are such a damn lot of them!"

His lips trembled. For two pins or less he could have cried like a baby.

"Janet—and you—and father," she said. "Everything seems to be slipping at once. I'm scared out of my wits. What does it all mean?"

"God's got a grudge against us," said Julian bitterly.

"No, not God, old boy," said Mrs. Perryam, "the Devil. . . . Perhaps Grandfather was right. . . . Our house was built on sand, without principles, without religion. It's all my fault. I've been a rotter. I ought to be whipped!"

She sat on the edge of Julian's bed and dabbed her eyes with a little lace handkerchief.

"Your fault?" asked Julian astounded. "Rot!"

"If it hadn't been for me," she said, "your father wouldn't have gone on working for *The Week*. He would have chucked it long ago—he loathed it like poison."

"A pity he didn't," said Julian.

Mrs. Perryam gave a little whimper at the pity of things.

"During the last few years it's been a torture to him. But I was all for Success. The house at Gorse Hill, all the servants, my beautiful gardens—the fun of being an Important Lady! And I always hated the old days of poverty and uncertainty. Brixton! . . . My word! . . ."

"I don't blame you," said Julian. But his mother continued to blame herself.

"I egged on poor old Daddy. Julian must go to Winchester and Oxford. Janet must go to a foreign school. I must get my frocks at Redfern's. We must live up to our position. Oh, that damned Position! . . . It's all come of that. If I hadn't played at being a great lady, I might have looked after you and Janet better. She wouldn't have

gone off to night clubs with bad young men who play fast and loose. She wouldn't have fallen in with a rotten crowd. I was worried about her, but I thought it was all right, because other girls were doing the same thing. I didn't want to be frumpish, with the morals of the Brixton Road and Grandfather's Baptist Chapel. . . . Well, now I know! I blame myself for everything."

She wept a little and tried to control herself by twisting the tassels of Julian's coverlet.

"That's all bunk!" said Julian. "You've been the best mother in the world. Do you think we'd have been any different if the Governor had stayed in the Brixton Road, or if you'd lugged us off to Grandfather's chapel for hymn-howling exercises? We should have revolted against it just the same. Janet would have flirted with some boy she picked up in the local cinema. I should have made an ass of myself with a girl clerk or a little shop girl. It's not your fault, mater! It's the fault of life. It's human nature at work, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be—plus a few additional risks due to the self-conceit of the Young Idea."

Mrs. Perryam wiped away her tears and smiled a little.

"You're getting very wise in your old age! Anyhow, I'm glad you defend your wicked old mother."

Julian sat on the bed by her side and held her hand.

"Wicked!" he said, and put her hand to his lips.

He asked about Janet. Had she heard about Cyril and Evelyn?

His voice faltered.

"I told her," said Mrs. Perryam. "She's been crying for a week."

"He's a damned good riddance!" said Julian, with a sudden rage in his voice. "Fancy if she had married the swine!"

"Yes!" said Mrs. Perryam. "And it wasn't my fault that she didn't. There I am again, you see! At the bottom of everything!"

Presently she looked into Julian's eyes, as though searching the state of his mind.

"I'm sorry about Evelyn," she said. "You've had a bad time, old boy! . . . But that's another escape."

"Not for Evelyn," said Julian, in a low voice. "I can't bear to think of it. With that beast!"

He rose from the bed and went to the window and stifled the agony of his groan.

Then he turned round and spoke quietly.

"We had better go back to the next room. Prichard will wonder what we're doing."

Mrs. Perryam agreed.

She hesitated a moment, and then put her hand on Julian's arm and said, "We shall want a lot of pluck, old boy. I'm scared about Daddy. He doesn't sleep at nights."

"Tell him to chuck *The Week,*" said Julian.

Mrs. Perryam shook her head. "He's queer about that. He insists on loyalty to the Old Man—now that he's threatened. Have you heard the latest?"

"No," said Julian, and his heart gave a thump.

"The Public Prosecutor is getting busy. Those articles in *Verity*— The Old Man is to be brought up at the Old Bailey."

Julian drew a deep breath. So Henry Caffyn had won the first round! Then he asked an urgent question.

"What about father?"

"He's all right as far as the law is concerned," said Mrs. Perryam. "They're satisfied he had no share in the Victory Bond scheme."

"Thank God for that!" said Julian.

They went into the next room. Stokes Prichard and Janet were laughing over the album of snap shots. There was a remarkable photograph of Julian swimming in a straw hat after being upset in Prichard's canoe.

"Supercilious even in the river!" said Janet, with a gaiety which seemed so natural that Julian was almost deceived.

"What a look of heroic resignation!" said Mrs. Perryam, laughing at the picture. They stayed half an hour longer, chatting merrily. There was no other chance of private conversation, but Julian arranged to go down to Gorse Hill for the week-end.

"Bring Mr. Prichard," said Mrs. Perryam, with a glance at Janet. "You young people can get some tennis."

"I'm yearning for it!" said Prichard. "Thanks a million times."

Half way down the stairs Janet remembered that she had left her handkerchief in Julian's room.

"Come and help me find it," she asked him. It was a trick to get a private word with him.

"Oh, Julian!" she said, when they were alone together. "That little cat Evelyn! She's played a vile game with both of us."

"I blame Cyril," said Julian. "He's the lowest kind of cad."

Janet had no good reason to defend Cyril, but she raged against Evelyn.

"She had the eyes of a cat, and the ways of a cat. Sly and sleek. I always suspected her. She was always after Cyril, tempting him, playing with him. Just like she played with you."

"Well, the game's finished now," said Julian bitterly. "You and I pay, old girl. . . . Now there's this business about the Governor."

"I wish I were dead!" said Janet, and she gave a little cry, with her hands up to her face.

He said "Hush! Hush!" and waited while she recovered herself well enough to go downstairs again.

Prichard was ecstatic to Julian when Mrs. Perryam and Janet had gone.

"That sister of yours, old man! I'm utterly smitten. And that amazingly beautiful mother! Some people are born with all the luck."

"Yes," said Julian. "And some aren't."

He was looking out of window at a newsboy coming up York Street. His contents bill was flapping in the wind, but Julian read the words as he stood for a moment at the corner of John Street.

"Serious Charge Against Victor Buckland."

XL

THE trial of Victor Buckland lasted for a week, and the Court was crowded by barristers, journalists, racing men, advertising men, and the general public, excited by this drama in which one of the most notorious figures of English life played the central and tragic part. Mr. Perryam was under subpœna as a witness, but never called by either side, though it meant that he had to attend the Court every day. Julian was with him, at the urgent request of his mother, and sat through that long and dreary trial in which the evidence was mainly arithmetical and entirely devoid of sensation except for the figure of that man who stepped down from the dock and conducted his own case from the solictors' table. The newspapers made the most of the case, and especially of "breezes" between Victor Buckland and the Attorney General or Victor Buckland and the Judge, but in Court these incidents hardly broke the awful monotony of dulness which settled heavily upon Julian's mind. He could not pretend to understand the arithmetic. He could not follow the Old Man's cross-examination of the witnesses called by the Crown nor see the point of his sudden outbursts of indignation when the Judge allowed certain evidence to be put in. To Julian, as to many others in Court perhaps, the drama—until the last day—was confined to the character study of that tall, heavy figure with puffed eyes and massive face who for ten years had claimed to represent the people of England, and who, in fact, had played upon the instincts and passions of the Mob Mind with a sure touch and some kind of genius. For Julian there was an intense personal and painful interest in the study of this man, in the play of expression on his flabby face, in his gestures, sighs, smiles, moments of rage and irritation, gloomy pauses, hesitations, blusterings, blandness.

"My father," thought Julian, "was made by that man.

Master and man! . . . He's our benefactor, blast him! Gorse Hill wouldn't have existed without him. I shouldn't have gone to Oxford but for his success. Even now, if he goes down, we all go down."

Then again.

"That man is the father of Cyril. The father of that beast!"

Julian watched him intently. Was he conscious of guilt? It was hard to say. There were times when he smiled at the weakness of the case against him, when he ridiculed points of evidence with a kind of bland assurance in his perfect honesty of intention and act. Either he was a great actor or he believed in his own innocence and righteousness. Julian inclined to think that he was not acting, not lying even when he denied the desire to obtain this money subscribed by his readers for any fraudulent intent. To him it was merely a sporting risk which he had placed before his readers, a gambler's chance of great prizes. The law said it was illegal. More fool the law! They had tried to prove that he had converted the money to his own use. That was for them to prove. Impossible to prove, as he would show by incontrovertible figures. . . . Occasionally—very rarely—his assurance left him for a moment. A troubled look came into his eyes. His fat fingers fumbled at the top button of his white waistcoat or trembled as he held his pince-nez. It was when the Judge asked a series of questions, very quietly, in a cold, enquiring voice.

"Perhaps you will tell us, Mr. Buckland, why it is that you concealed that transaction from the Insurance Company?

"It did not occur to you to mention the fact? But surely, as a business man, as a man of expert financial knowledge, your conduct of this case proves that without doubt it must have been in your mind at the time as a most essential fact?

"You considered it irrelevant? That is the answer you wish to make?

"Very well!"

That "Very well!" seemed to Julian to contain a very damning threat to that Old Man whose answers to the

Judge had been rather hesitating. And it seemed that old Buckland was aware of some trap that had opened beneath his feet. Or perhaps of some hole of escape that had been blocked up. His eyes roved toward the jury, uneasily. It was to them that he turned very often, with a smile, as though to say, "You and I are men of the world. Sportsmen. We like our little flutter. You and I understand each other. You know old Victor Buckland. The Soldier's Friend in the war. The enemy of Cant, Killjoys, Pro-Huns, Bolsheviks, Cranks. This absurd old Judge! This ridiculous Attorney General!"

Julian watched the Judge. What delicate hands he had —almost transparent! And how gracefully he handled his long scarlet robe as he came into Court. He seemed to belong to the Eighteenth Century, aloof from the modern, vulgar, noisy world. His thin voice was perfectly modulated. His pale blue eyes seemed to look with contempt at that crowded gallery filled with racing tipsters, the riff-raff who had followed Victor Buckland as a prophet. His delicate, clear-cut face might have been a cameo on an old snuff-box. . . . Once or twice his eyes rested on Victor Buckland with a searching gaze, as though trying to penetrate to the mind behind that heavy mask. Once, and only once, he spoke angrily, with a sudden passion in his voice, leaning forward with a gesture of indignation.

"I do not allow that question to the witness. It is a most scandalous suggestion of political motives in this trial which is unwarranted by any evidence. I shall take notice of that in my summing up."

"I beg your Lordship's pardon," said Mr. Buckland, "but I must insist upon putting that question to the witness. It is extremely important to my case."

The Judge's lips tightened.

"I have disallowed that question, Mr. Buckland. If you try to put it, you will be taking a grave risk."

"Begging your Lordship's pardon—"

"I have warned you, sir."

The warning was effective. Victor Buckland breathed rather loudly, shrugged his heavy shoulders, smiled uneasily

at the jury, and put a different question to the witness. In his sombre eyes there was a baffled look. . . .

At the end of the fourth day he looked tired and harried. His face was greyer and his lips twitched. He seemed to be breaking under the strain of the Attorney General's cross-examination. Several times he seemed to Julian like an animal at bay, trapped in a net, unable to break through its meshes. But even then, on that fourth day, which was his great ordeal, his terrific will power, or some faith in his star, enabled him to mask his sense of fear for all but those brief moments of revelation when he moistened his lips with a parched tongue, wiped beads of sweat from his forehead, stared at his torturer—the cool, stern figure of the Attorney General—with rage and agony.

"Henry Caffyn has won," thought Julian. "This man is lost. What will happen then? What about my father, and all of us?"

He was torn by two conflicting forces. The desire to see this Old Man dragged down from his place in English life, unmasked to the people he had duped and cheated; pity and fear for his own father.

Mr. Perryam sat all day long almost motionless by Julian's side, listening to the evidence intently, with a puzzled look as though desperately endeavouring to get a clue to this labyrinth of figures. Hardly once did he take his gaze from the face of Victor Buckland. He seemed fascinated and spellbound by that man who had been his evil genius and his paymaster. Julian heard his father sigh noisily now and then or draw a quick breath when the evidence went against his Chief. Towards the end of the third day he fell into the nervous habit of jigging his right knee up and down ceaselessly.

Julian saw two familiar faces in Court, day by day, listening intently. One was Henry Caffyn, who had forced the Public Prosecutor to take action in this case. The other was Horace Burton, news editor of *The Week*.

At lunch time Mr. Perryam was very silent as a rule and did not eat the food he ordered.

"How do you think it's going?" asked Julian at the end of the fourth day.

His father asked another question in return.

"What's your impression, sonny?"

"I think they'll get him," said Julian.

His father sighed and said, "The Judge is against him. He's done this time."

As they walked back to the Old Bailey he leaned heavily on Julian's arm.

"It's the end of me too, Julian. I'm disgraced. The Editor of *The Week*. Buckland's man. I'll never live that down. . . . Well, I deserve it. I ought to have left him —years ago!"

"You ought to leave him now," said Julian heatedly. "Why do you still go to that cursèd office?"

Mr. Perryam pressed his arm.

"It's not the time to leave him now—when all the world's against him. All those people who fawned on him. All those dogs who were greedy for the offal he gave them. All his racing friends, and newspaper friends, and advertising touts, and political crooks, and titled swine. They've run from him, tumbling over each other to deny their friendship with him. They're all ready to howl in chorus when the trial's over, 'The most malign influence in English life,' 'The most corrupt old scoundrel in the country!' I can hear their talk at the very tables where they lunched and dined with him and drunk his wine and asked him to let them in on the latest gamble. The corner of the Savoy grill-room! . . . No, now is not the time to leave him."

Julian was moved by this loyalty of his father to a man whom he had always hated and despised. It was nobler anyhow than the "ratting" of the Old Man's other friends. They ratted from his father too, because of that loyalty and his position on *The Week*. Julian noticed that, and flushed red with rage. It was when he was lunching with his father at Gatti's in the Strand. At a table near them were two of the men who had been at that luncheon-party in the Savoy—the only lunch that Julian had had with

Victor Buckland. One was the advertising manager of a great millinery firm, the other a new Peer. They had both laughed loudest at the Old Man's blue stories. When they saw Mr. Perryam, they put their heads closer and whispered. When he nodded to them their lips tightened and they stared over his head. Julian noticed that his father was embarrassed and hurt, though he did not say a word about it.

He stayed at a hotel in Norfolk Street Strand during the progress of the trial, and Julian went round and dined with him as a rule, and stayed smoking after dinner until ten o'clock when Mr. Perryam said, "Time to turn in, old boy!"

They avoided the subject of the trial as far as possible, though always it was in their minds. But one evening, towards the end of the week, the day before Victor Buckland was to make his speech in defence, Mr. Perryam spoke to his son almost as though the trial had ended. Julian noticed that he talked about Victor Buckland in the past tense as though he were dead.

"He had his good points," he said. "The world will only remember the bad side of his character and his downfall, but I remember other things. He was generous. A tale of woe always made him put his hand in his pocket. He really loved the masses in his crude, showman kind of way. It wasn't all hypocrisy. Perhaps not at all—consciously. He wept at the losses in the war and would do anything for the men. Of course he played up the war for all it was worth, and banged the big drum, and roared out the Song of Hate, but that was his idea of patriotism. He was a crude, ignorant, brutal man, but with a strain of sincerity and genuine emotion. We must allow him that. And yet, I suppose he was a hypocrite too!—just as some quack doctors or spiritualist fakers are half frauds with an eye to the main chance but with an underlying credulity in their own claims. A bully at times, and utterly immoral in all financial matters. Oh, a scoundrel all right, but I think now of the qualities which made him a human instead of an inhuman monster. I think it was that human side

which blinded me to my own dishonour. I mean it made me find excuses for service with him."

At another time he alluded to Cyril.

"The Old Man idolised that boy of his. I'm told by his solicitor that his biggest grief, apart from standing in the dock, is the utter silence of his son. The young scoundrel hasn't written a line, or sent a message, or shown up in Court."

Julian was silent, thinking of Evelyn, and his father made his nerves jump by referring to her.

"That young woman who went away with him will rue the day. What incredible folly! What tragedy in the future!"

He was silent for quite a time, brooding over his thoughts.

Then he looked up at Julian with wistful eyes, full of tenderness and emotion.

"I'm afraid it's up to you, Julian, now! My day's done. I shall never get another job. Nothing worth while, anyhow. Perhaps a sub-editorship on ten pounds a week—if I'm lucky! You'll have to buckle to and help to support your mother and Janet. Poor darlings! . . . Poor darlings! They won't like poverty. . . . Janet has never known it."

"You'll get another job all right," said Julian cheerfully, "with your ability and experience, father!"

But he spoke insincerely. In his heart he believed that his father's pessimism was justified.

Mr. Perryam shook his head and said, "Not a chance, old son. I know Fleet Street."

Before going to bed he made one more remark about Victor Buckland.

"The Old Man is still pinning his faith on an acquittal. He believes he will get the jury with him to-morrow in his final speech, so the solicitor tells me. It's his desperate hope."

"What do you think?" asked Julian.

Mr. Perryam's answer showed that he had made up his

mind about that trial to which he had been listening with strained attention through its jungle of figures.

"There's only one verdict, Julian. Guilty as Hell."

And yet on the following day Julian was not at all certain that this would be the verdict. Victor Buckland's speech to the jury was a tremendous effort of oratory and emotion. The Old Man had pulled himself together and called up all his reserves of passion, fire, bluff, and craftiness. Julian could see that the jury were shaken. After a masterly analysis of the arithmetic of the case which for the first time seemed to be simple, comprehensible, and convincing, and a display of legal knowledge which obviously disconcerted the Attorney General and his juniors, the Old Man swept all that on one side by an appeal to the jury to arrive at their verdict not on legal subtleties or conflicting figures, but on their judgment of his motives, his character, and his reputation. Had he not served his country with more fidelity than most men could claim? In time of war had he not been the Soldier's Friend? He had organised a vast scheme of comforts for the troops. He had devoted himself to the interests of poor old Tommy Atkins in the trenches. He had unmasked the abominations of their Enemy. He had been the greatest recruiting agency in the Kingdom, lighting the fires of patriotism and loyalty, keeping them burning in the heart of the people until Victory was assured. Was it likely that he of all men would desire to defraud the people he had loved? Was it conceivable that he should use his power and popularity to obtain their money under false pretences? He pointed to the record of *The Week*—its noble service to humanity, its campaigns against villainy and vice, its consistent stand on the side of the angels. It had defended the sanctity of home life—"the safety of your wives and daughters, gentlemen of the jury!"—it had upheld the liberties of England against the kill-joys who wished to deprive the working man of Beer and the middle classes of simple pleasures; it had been inspired by the spirit of God in its reverence for religion, and its love of the oppressed, the weak, the down-trodden.

"Is it imaginable, is it within the bounds of sanity, that I, the founder of that paper, its guiding mind, the director of its policy—its weekly Voice, speaking from the heart of Truth to the soul of the English People, should be guilty of this corrupt act with which I stand falsely charged? Gentlemen of the Jury, you may not understand arithmetic, all those fantastic figures with which the Attorney General juggled so skilfully, but as men of the world and honest citizens you understand the ordinary laws of human nature. Those laws would be violated if I, a Patriot and a Friend of Man, should betray my whole life of honour and devotion by a low and dirty fraud. They would be outraged, and the very Angels of the Lord would weep with shame and grief, if, by horrible injustice, or inconceivable cruelty, a verdict of guilty should be brought against me, as I stand here facing not only a jury of twelve of my fellow citizens, but the jury of the nation which I have served with love, with passion, with self-sacrifice."

His voice broke for a moment, and he wept before them.

Julian felt moved for the first time by pity. The sight of that old man's tears seemed to curdle his blood. Perhaps he really believed in his own honour and honesty. It was impossible that any man should be so colossal a hypocrite as to speak like that without revealing his insincerity. One of the jury turned red with emotion. The others sat watching Victor Buckland with troubled eyes. Julian glanced at the Judge. He too was looking at the Old Man, weeping there, but there was no compassion in his pale blue eyes, and a faintly contemptuous smile played for a moment on that delicate face which Julian saw in profile framed in its great wig.

When Victor Buckland sat down after two hours there was an uneasy stir in Court, a murmur of applause sternly hushed, the movement of reporters sending out their slips.

The Attorney General spoke again, but briefly, and then sat down and awaited the Judge's summing up. If the verdict had been given before that summing up it might have been in favour of Victor Buckland, but not afterwards. It was deadly in its analysis and weighed heavily against that

Old Man who had gone back to the dock and sat there frowning heavily, with a face that grew more sombre and seemed to be touched by death's pallor, as the Judge's words flowed on in a quiet damning monologue.

Towards the end of it Julian turned to his father. Mr. Perryam was as pale as the Old Man. There was a clammy moisture on his forehead.

"Let's go," he said. "I feel a little faint."

They managed to get through the swing doors and a policeman helped Mr. Perryam to a stone seat in the entrance hall, where he sat with his head bowed.

"Better get in the fresh air," said the policeman. "Very muggy in here."

"No," said Mr. Perryam, "I must wait for the verdict. I shall have to see him afterwards."

"Good Lord, no!" said Julian. "For Heaven's sake—"

Mr. Perryam said something about "Duty" and "Common humanity."

It was two hours before the verdict was given by the jury. Julian heard it from the policeman who had opened the swing doors half an inch and stood there listening. He turned his head slightly and looked at Julian, and whispered a word, the most terrible word.

"Guilty!"

Then he listened again. Through the crack of the door Julian could hear the Judge's voice, speaking in a monologue again. There was a brief silence, followed by the stir of the Court rising, a low murmur of voices, a scuffle of feet in the galleries.

The swing door was opened wide, and several counsel hurried out with papers. A reporter dodged them, and ran into the central hall, and out through the swing doors beyond.

Julian tried to ask the policeman what the sentence was, but other barristers and journalists passed between them.

"Well, I expected it," said one of the barristers. "Bound to make an example of him. Poor old devil!"

A journalist was fumbling with his notes. He seemed to have lost a sheet. Julian asked him a question.

"What's the sentence?"

"Seven years! . . . Damned stiff! . . . That's the end of *The Week* all right!"

Horace Burton, the news editor, came out with the lawyer whom Julian had seen in his father's room. They looked around for Mr. Perryam, and saw him standing with his hands behind his back, staring at the stone floor in an absent-minded way.

Julian heard the lawyer's words to his father.

"He wants to see you, sir."

"What's the sentence?" asked Mr. Perryam.

The lawyer told him, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course he'll appeal. There's just a chance."

"No chance," said Mr. Perryam harshly. "Don't let's deceive ourselves."

He looked about for Julian, and beckoned him.

"I expect I shall be half an hour. Don't wait, old boy."

"I'll wait," said Julian.

He watched his father walk away with the lawyer and disappear through one of the swing doors. He walked heavily, with his hand on the lawyer's arm, as though needing support.

Horace Burton stayed with Julian.

"Well, that's that!" he said, and laughed nervously.

Julian answered irritably.

"You seem to find it amusing."

"No," said Burton, "it makes me feel sick. Now it's all over I'm sorry for the old villain. I hate to see animals tortured. . . . Seven years! Worse than death for a man like that."

He looked at Julian with his evasive eyes, and after a short silence spoke again:

"It's a bad blow for your father. *The Week* is bound to go under. The Public won't stand for it now. Our returns are colossal already, and the bookstalls are getting shy. . . . I'm looking for another job."

He gave his nervous laugh again.

"On the streets for the third time! My wife is feeling

pretty rotten about it. Journalism, eh? Charming profession!"

He stood there talking bitterly to Julian and once or twice seemed to find some comfort in thinking that he had "warned" Julian of the abominations of the Street.

"That morning you joined up! I told you what to expect. Here's another little victim, I thought. Little does he know! Well, I told you, didn't I?"

Julian felt tempted to tell him that he was one of the men who degraded journalism to its lowest level. But this was no time for personal argument. He was thinking of the scene that must be taking place between his father and the Old Man. A horrible half hour! Would his father curse him for having dragged him down and caused his ruin and disgrace? That verdict and sentence had brought them both low after the success they had built up together. The Old Man would have to serve his seven years. He would still be rich if he came out again. Cyril would never have to do a stroke of work. He could keep Evelyn all right. . . . But Julian's father would lose everything he had struggled for during a life time of toil. He had sold himself to Victor Buckland for a good price and now there would be no more payment. The contract was finished, and his father was left stranded because of the Old Man's villainy. They would all have to pay for that. His mother, and Janet, and himself. Good-bye, Gorse Hill! It was ruin for the whole family. Father and son, those Bucklands had played the devil with the Perryam household. Disgrace, tragedy, and shame had come with them.

"We're in the mud," thought Julian. "And all because of that old swine and his son. It's unfair. It's damned unfair! Why should I be punished for my father's folly? It's the injustice of life. It's the cursèd absurdity of being born."

He wished that he had not been born. Standing there in the hall of the Old Bailey, he had a grudge against the Universe because he was part of it and subject to its monstrous unfairness.

Then he saw his father. He came back through the swing doors, and looked broken and spent.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, old boy," he said in a humble way. "Let's take a taxi."

He nodded to Burton, and said something about seeing him next day.

In the cab he took off his hat and wiped his forehead.

"That poor old man!" he said. "Whatever his guilt, that sentence is fearful. It's a living torture. It will be hell on earth to him. Terrible! Terrible! The cruelty of Justice!"

At the hotel he ordered a brandy and soda, but did not drink it.

"I feel ill, old boy," he said to Julian. "I hardly think I shall be able to get up to my room."

"Why not?" asked Julian, with a sudden sharp anxiety.

"It is my heart," said Mr. Perryam. "Queer for a long time, old boy. I didn't say anything. Now this shock—"

He sat down on the sofa in the lounge and breathed heavily, with one hand against his side.

It was with the hall porter's help that Julian took him upstairs to his room. There he seemed to crumple up quite suddenly as he sat back in an arm chair. His left arm and leg were twisted and his face stiffened and seemed to wither.

"It's a stroke," said the hall porter. "God Almighty!"

XLI

STOKES PRICHARD, Clatworthy, and others were very decent to Julian, he thought, during his time of trouble. Mervyn and Burnaby made a point of looking him up, inviting him to lunch, when funds were good enough, and showing by silence more than by words that they were loyal to their friendship. Julian was glad of that. It softened some of his bitterness. Morbidly sensitive, he had shrunk from the disgrace attached to his father's name as editor of *The Week*. He had shrunk even from Clatworthy's greeting in Pall Mall when that young man had come face to face with him after the trial. For the twentieth part of a second he had believed that Clatworthy would give him "the frozen face" as the son of a man whose name was linked so closely with the Buckland case. He did Clatworthy a gross injustice.

"My dear old man!" said that representative of the Younger Crowd. "What a time you've been having! You look as if one of my extra special cocktails would do you all the good in the world. Come round to the Carlton and have lunch."

"You oughtn't to be seen about with me," said Julian. "Your father's name, and all that."

Clatworthy had laughed loudly, and made a funny face in the middle of Pall Mall, to the great astonishment of an American tourist searching for the R.A.C.

"If you care to be seen in the company of the Missing Link, his father's name will be ennobled."

He had linked arms with Julian and talked seriously on the way to the Carlton.

"Don't get morbid over this affair, old lad. Your father comes out of it without a stain. And from what I hear his loyalty to poor old Buckland was a shining example. Loyalty's easy when it pays. It's damned hard—and damned good—when a man is down and out—whatever his crime."

"Look here," he said again, pressing Julian's arm, "keep your sense of humour, old kid, and a stiff upper lip against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. That's the English tradition, isn't it? We like to think so!"

"At the moment," said Julian, "my sense of humour has gone astray. Life doesn't seem a little bit funny with a paralysed father, a sale of household effects at Gorse Hill, Janet crying her eyes out, and the whole family reduced to ruin. If you can see any joke there, tell me!"

"None whatever at the moment," agreed Clatworthy. "But it will be a jolly good joke when you raise the family fortunes again with that brilliant brain of yours, old kid—joking apart this time!—dry your pretty sister's eyes and become a shining light of the younger crowd. Prichard and I are counting on that. We look to you to play the great game."

Julian smiled at this optimistic vision. It was one of Clatworthy's absurdities. But all the same it stiffened him a little and was comforting. It was something that his friends believed in him. He would have a try. He wouldn't show the white feather, anyhow. For the mater's sake, and Janet's, he would have to get busy.

Henry Caffyn was helping him to get busy. It was rather strange that the author of his father's downfall—for undoubtedly it was Caffyn's articles that had brought Victor Buckland to the dock and smashed *The Week*—should now be going out of his way to help the Perryam family out of the ditch, by putting opportunities in Julian's way, and by giving him advice, encouragement, introductions, and ideas.

On the evening following the Old Man's condemnation he had come down to Julian's rooms with a troubled look behind his pince-nez. No triumph in his keen grey eyes, as Julian had expected.

"You've won, sir," said Julian, rather bitterly. "Perhaps it may interest you to know that you've not only destroyed old Buckland but struck down my father as well. Withered him down one side."

Henry Caffyn nodded, and looked at Julian with sympathy.

"I know. Young Prichard told me about your father. That's tragic."

"It's damned unfair," said Julian.

The old man—not very old, but with streaks of white in his hair and beard—and the boy who looked rather broken by too many blows of fate about the head, were silent for a little while, each busy with his thoughts. Presently Henry Caffyn began to pace up and down in his restless nervous way.

"The innocent suffer for the guilty," he said at length. "That's one of the inevitabilities of life. In peace as well as in war. One strikes at evil, and nine times out of ten one's blows hurt those who have nothing to do with it. The thief's wife and children—decent folk deluded into an unjust war, the liberal-minded aristocracy of Czardom, the good-meaning, weak-willed King—like old Louis XVI.—blameless of a tyrannical system upheld by swine about him. It's always been like that. All the same one has to fight evil, though innocence gets hurt."

He spoke of Victor Buckland with compassionate emotion.

"I daresay you think I chortled when that Old Man received his sentence? It was my victory, as you say! My dear boy, I can hardly sleep at night for thinking of that poor old fellow in his living tomb. If I had the power I would unlock his cell to-morrow and say, 'Get out, and go away, anywhere you like, so long as you cease to pollute the public mind.' I hate to see wild animals in a cage, though I like hunting them. The man-eating tiger has my sympathy when he's trapped. I'm one of those sentimentalists—a humanist I call myself!—who go sick at the sight of cells and bolts and bars. I think our modern prison system is a more refined kind of torture than the old jails of Dickens' time where there was at least companionship in misery and foul air and foul talk less deadening than our nice, clean, sanitary, silent hells. No. I'm enormously touched with pity for that poor old wretch, now I've helped to unmask him and destroy his power. But I had to do that. For England's sake. For the sake of any idealism

that is at work against the forces of hate and corruption and sinister cruelty and falsehood. The British Press wanted cleansing—it wants a lot more!—and the public conscience needed a heavy jolt. It was monstrous that an old man like Buckland should be tolerated, flattered, envied, and used by the leaders of our political and social life. I was determined to get at him, and break him. I rejoice that I've done so. But I sicken at the thought of his mental and physical torture. . . . As for your father, I am sorry beyond words."

Later in the evening he said that if Julian felt like writing a series of articles on Oxford life and types—with a light touch—he would place them in a magazine edited by one of his best friends and get a good price for them. He had already mentioned the matter and the editor was keen, having the sound notion of encouraging the Young Idea to become articulate and state its point of view.

"We haven't a point of view," said Julian. "Except flippancy and impatience with all the bunk talked about us."

"Excellent!" cried Henry Caffyn. "Let's have that. Tremendously valuable."

He was wonderfully helpful about those articles, suggesting all kinds of points for Julian's consideration and mapping out a kind of synopsis. He did not spare criticism, and rewrote many paragraphs, not altering the sense, but getting rid of the somewhat stilted style which Julian adopted now and then, compressing verbose pages, and touching up slipshod phrases.

Better than his criticism to Julian's temperament was his appreciation, his enthusiastic enjoyment of Julian's most bitter and most candid revelations of Youth's quarrel with the Old People, and the mess which they had made of things, and their intolerance, and misunderstanding, and impatience.

"By Jumbo! That's a hard knock!" he exclaimed once or twice.

"That's a deadly upper cut, my lad!" he said at another sitting. "It fairly makes my jaw ache. As one of the Old

People I feel like lying down on the mat and refusing to get up before I'm counted out."

He laughed with shrill enjoyment of some of Julian's epigrams.

"Neatly turned! Devilish neat! I couldn't have said that after hours of cogitation. . . . Wow! That's a good 'un!"

Perhaps he exaggerated his pleasure out of kindness of heart. Julian suspected that sometimes, but felt that it was a good tonic to his *moral.* He was getting keen on those articles—twelve of them—and sat up half the night to write them, feeling for the first time the joy of creation, the adorable sense of self-expression. This work was lifting his depression. Ambition stirred in him, not vaguely now, but with a definite goal. It was utterly necessary to earn money, and he could no longer fall back on the comfortable thought of a weekly allowance from a father who might grumble but always "shelled out." He had got to "make good," as the Americans say, standing on his own feet, and support, or at least help to support, the whole family besides. After the sale of the big house at Gorse Hill and its furniture, there would not be more than a few thousands to provide for his father and mother, Janet, and old Grandfather. He would have now to be the breadwinner, for his father was out of it, utterly stricken.

There were times when Julian was appalled by this thought, and when an immense desolation of despair threatened to overwhelm him. There were other times when he was panic-stricken. How on earth could he hope to keep all these people and himself in even decent poverty by scratching words on bits of blank paper? Sometimes the words wouldn't come. For hours at a time he couldn't write a line. What he wrote was all wrong, and he had to tear it up in disgust and start again. But Henry Caffyn's encouragement propped him up, and a cheque for twenty pounds for his first two articles was enormously helpful to his courage.

He showed the cheque to Stokes Prichard whose rooms

he still shared though he would have to clear out on account of expense.

"First fruits!" he said shyly.

Stokes Prichard was enormously impressed.

"Twenty quid! Good Lord, old man, if you go on at that pace you'll be a man of wealth! Motor cars again, and the flesh pots of Egypt!"

"It takes a good many articles to make a Metallurgique!" said Julian.

He had sold his car to pay half shares of Prichard's rooms and an outstanding tailor's bill. It had been a horrible portent of impending poverty. He had almost wept over the wheel when he drove his little old car to a garage in Longacre.

And yet he felt curiously cheerful sometimes, far more cheerful than when he had been lounging in the garden at Gorse Hill or arranging secret meetings with Evelyn Iffield. That was extraordinary, and he failed to understand it. He was actually afraid of himself one morning when he caught himself singing in his bath.

"I'm going scranny, or something," he said. "Why the devil should I feel exhilarated—singing like Stokes Prichard when he turns on the bath tap—when my poor old governor is lying paralysed, and the family fortunes have gone crash, and everything has happened to break a fellow's spirit? It's unnatural. It's hysteria or something."

He spoke to Audrey Nye on the subject. They met for lunch sometimes in an A.B.C. shop at Ludgate Hill.

"You're looking marvellously well," she said. "A brighter light in your eyes, Julian."

He waited until the waitress had deposited the eggs on toast, and gone away to another table.

"I'm getting scared at myself," he said. "I sang in my bath this morning. Do you think I'm sickening for something?"

He spoke half jestingly, but with an underlying sincerity.

Audrey looked at him searchingly, with smiling eyes.

"It's the rebound," she said.

Julian did not quite follow that remark, and told her so.

"Why," she said, "we can't wallow in wretchedness, at our age. Life asserts itself. I cried for three weeks—in private—when we first came to Clapham. Everything seemed appalling. Clapham! The semi-detached house. Having to make one's own bed. These A.B.C. lunches. After Fuller's in the Cornmarket! The office! An out-of-work father. A melancholy ma. Then one day I began to perk up and feel bright. 'Hell!' I said, 'I'm still young, and life's good, in spite of everything. I'm not going to wallow. There are a lot of people in the world—Russian refugees, Greek refugees, Austrians, Germans in the Ruhr, people in Bermondsey and Bow,—who would envy me this red brick villa in Clapham, and these poached eggs on toast with jam-roll to follow, and my salary from the Labour Institute. Am I going to show the white feather when they have so much courage? Not very English, old girl!' After that I felt better. But it wasn't philosophy that helped me. It was red blood in young veins. Life breaking out of morbid melancholy. I just could not go on being wretched."

Julian smiled faintly.

"Possibly," he said. "But there's more in it than that."

Audrey agreed that there was a lot more. Mysterious psychological laws. Instinct. Impulse. Self-defence. The preservation of the species. Also there was jam-roll, which, honestly, was quite as good as one could get at Fuller's in the Cornmarket, unless her appetite was better.

She suggested another reason why it was impossible to pander to misery.

"One gets bored even with melancholy. The healthy human brain refuses to harp on the minor string interminably. It's so tedious. Then again, if one faces up to obstacles and overcomes them, one has a sense of exhilaration. It's the test of one's moral fibre. If one passes the test without a break-down, it gives one a sense of self-reliance, a spiritual glow such as comes to one after a cold bath, which is abominably unpleasant in mid-winter."

"You find out reasons for things, don't you?" said Julian with his touch of sarcasm.

"Sometimes. I don't always tell them," said Audrey. "But it's good to grope towards the truth."

"How's the family?" asked Julian.

The Nye family was improving financially, though perhaps deteriorating morally, as far as Julia and Celia were concerned. Those two little wretches had abandoned their pigtails and were getting more cheeky than ever. They regarded Audrey as a hopelessly old-fashioned and reactionary person. They demanded the rights of youth against the tyranny of old age, especially in the matter of reading in bed.

"Such books, too! I actually caught Julia reading Elinor Glyn!"

"Good Heavens!" said Julian.

Mr. Nye was teaching Latin to the elder girls in a convent school at Clapham for very good pay, but the Reverend Mother had warned him that she would have to discontinue his services if he wrote mystical verse in the girls' exercise books. Some of the parents objected and suspected amorous ambitions.

"Is he still as cheerful as ever?" asked Julian.

"More. Gay as a skylark, though down at heel. He finds poverty adorable, and sees the love of God in the knuckle end of a bone of mutton. Faith sustains him even when he reads the *Daily Mail.*"

"Amazing!" said Julian. "I wish to Heaven I could discover his secret. There must be something more in it than we imagine."

Audrey made a profound remark.

"I think there's love in it somewhere, and passionate self-sacrifice for love's sake."

"Human love?" asked Julian.

Audrey dropped her eyes before his gaze and said, "As part of the universal scheme of things."

Then she called for her "cheque" from the A.B.C. waitress and said, "One and eightpence, which is twopence more than I ought to spend!"

Then she sped off to her office on the nearest motor bus.

"Passionate self-sacrifice for love's sake."

Julian pondered over those words, and wondered if they fitted the lock to the mystery of life. There might be sweetness as well as bitterness in sacrifice—for love's sake. Those fellows in the Great War—some of them, anyhow—had found some queer gladness in suffering lice and mud and shell fire for the sake of England, or some ideal inexplicable to themselves. Even his mother, so light-hearted, so utterly irreligious in the ordinary sense of the word, so fond of the pretty things of life,—how she had hated the memories of Brixton days!—seemed to get some magic strength out of sacrifice now that her husband lay stricken and desperately in need of her. Anyhow she put up a tremendous bluff.

Not once after that stroke of his did she repine at the downfall of the family fortunes, or utter one lament over the coming loss of all she had loved so much—her gardens, her glass-houses, her household gods.

The sight of Mr. Perryam brought home by Julian with one side of his face and body all stiff and dead, seemed to make all other things of no account. Julian and Janet watched her with their father, and marvelled. All the fretfulness of married life in the later years seemed to be washed out by that calamity. They were like lovers again. Mr. Perryam's eyes followed his wife with a smiling tenderness wherever she moved about the room, if she were within his range of vision, lying motionless, unable to lift himself. He was restless and unhappy if she went away from him for long. And Mrs. Perryam would hardly allow any one but herself to wait on him, and was jealous even of Janet if she gave him his medicine. She had a new gaiety, not artificial or assumed to deceive her children, but natural and real.

"Bang goes our Position!" she said, when the bills first went up outside the gate, notifying the public of "This Handsome Mansion for Sale."

"Poor old mater!" said Julian, full of commiseration.

But she wouldn't have his pity.

"As long as Daddy gets better, I don't care tuppence," she said. "Besides, it was all a fraud. All our fine friends! How many have rallied round us in this time of trouble? Anyhow it sifts the sheep from the goats, as Grandpa would say!"

On the whole her friends were more loyal than she expected, and that helped her to bear misfortunes with a smiling philosophy—with wonderful courage. A few ladies cut her in the High Street, disgusted by her husband's association with the man who was now a convict. Others "cooled off," as she called it, and forgot to invite Janet to their garden parties. But not many. Quite a number of the elderly people who had seemed so tired to Julian at the garden party, called round to enquire after Mr. Perryam's health and left fruit and flowers in token of sympathy.

Among these was the old Countess of Longhurst, who drove up one day in her carriage and pair. Julian happened to be at home—it was the week before the sale and his help was needed—and the old lady gave him two gristly fingers and said, "Poverty won't do *you* any harm, young man, if you've any grit in you. I only wish Johnny would have to earn his living by the sweat of his brow, instead of playing the fool in the Foreign Office—a pretty mess they've made of things!—and drinking cocktails at the Carlton."

To Mrs. Perryam she was exceedingly gracious, and really kind.

"I'm sorry that old Buckland man has made things awkward for you, my dear. Very hard on that good husband of yours. But there are worse misfortunes at sea, especially in time of war with German submarines about. Anyhow, I haven't come to prattle. If you want any money, I can lend you a bit—in spite of those Income Tax Commissioners who take the skin off my bones. Or if you want to get rid of Janet for a while—these modern girls are no good in a time of crisis—send her round to stay with me, and I'll introduce her to lots of young fellows who will fall in love with her. It might be a blessing to marry her off, and I'm all for mating young."

Needless to say, Mrs. Perryam did not borrow money or lend Janet, but she was pleased with the offer of help.

"That old dame is a credit to her class," she said. "If there were more of 'em there wouldn't be a chance for Bolshevism."

At another time she talked to Julian about her future plans.

"As soon as Daddy gets better"—she took that for granted—"I shall have to look out for a job of work."

"Not you," said Julian. "If I have to sit up all night and every night writing like an Oriental scribe, I won't let you go to work, mother."

She pooh-poohed his protest.

"Do you think I'm going to sit with my hands in my lap in a poky house in London while you get brain fever trying to keep a crowd of Old People? Not likely, laddy! If the worst comes to the worst, I'll scrub floors and cook the dinners of the New Rich."

Julian's grandfather approached him on the same subject.

"I've been reading the advertisements in *London Opinion,*" he said. "There seems to be a lot of opportunity for earning money by home work. They don't explain it exactly. Addressing envelopes, I daresay—and I write a good Civil Service hand. Or securing clients for a new brand of toothpaste. I wouldn't mind working some respectable district. I can still get about pretty well."

Julian was touched by the old man's courage and fidelity. He was less querulous since his son's stroke, though inclined to regard it as a judgment of God for abandoning the Baptist denomination in time of youth. Mrs. Perryam's cheerful resignation to misfortune had surprised him vastly and changed his opinion about her essential frivolity.

"Your mother is a better woman than I thought she was," he said once. "I may say that I regard her as a brave creature. Light-headed, but good at heart."

Even old Mary raked out her savings, amounting to seventy pounds, and insisted on handing them over to Mrs. Perryam.

"I won't never need it for a marriage trousseau," she said, sulkily, to hide her bashfulness. "It's yours, anyhow, every penny of it, and if you won't take it I'll throw it into the dust-bin and be damned to it."

It was Janet who was hardest hit, and least courageous. Mrs. Perryam was frightened about her.

"I don't like the way she weeps all day," she told Julian. "She'll cry her eyes out if she goes on much longer."

Julian was alarmed about her too. The idea of giving up the house at Gorse Hill and "sinking into squalor," as she called it, did not account for her utter abandonment to grief. She had a habit of going to her room between meal times and shutting herself up for hours together. When she reappeared it was with red eyes and a tragic look.

Julian went to her room one evening—it was the night before the day they were leaving Gorse Hill and going into rooms in Kensington. The door was locked, but Janet opened it after his repeated knock.

"What's the matter?" she asked, trying to hide her tear-stained face.

"That's what I want to know, old girl," said Julian.

He went in and shut the door and put his arms about her.

"Look here, you can't go on like this. You must pull yourself together. It isn't playing the game by the mater and pater."

"The game's finished as far as I'm concerned," said Janet, and she wept with violence, so that he was really frightened.

"It won't be so bad," he said. "After all, we shan't be so frightfully poor. There's a bit saved out of the wreckage. West Kensington is not next door to Hades."

"It's not that!" said Janet. "You all seem to think I'm only worrying about the money side of things."

"What is it, then?" asked Julian.

He would not go without an answer. When the answer came his face flushed.

"You seem to forget that affair with Cyril. What's the good of anything—now that I'm spoilt for ever? It's rotted up my whole life. I wish I were dead!"

"Curse Cyril!" said Julian passionately.

He took hold of his sister's arm, in a hard grip, as though by that pressure he might force her to be sensible.

"That episode belongs to the past. It's buried as far as I'm concerned. I decline to discuss it. I decline even to remember it. Let's forget it."

"It's easy for you," said Janet. "You're a man."

"It hasn't been easy," said Julian. "I've had a pretty rotten time."

Something in the break in his voice seemed to awaken Janet to a sense of her own selfishness. She leaned her head against his shoulder and said, "I know! You were hard hit, old boy. We're both in the same boat!"

"That's exactly it," said Julian. "We're both in the same boat, and the sea's a bit rough ahead. If we don't pull together we're going to be shipwrecked."

Janet smiled faintly at his nautical metaphor, but was not much consoled.

"What's the good of pretending?" she asked. "I wanted to have a good time in life. I'm not a saint like mother, resigned to spending the rest of her life in a sick bedroom between spells of household drudgery."

Julian stared at her gloomily.

"I thought you said you weren't worrying about the financial side of things?"

"It's all mixed up together," said Janet miserably. "It's the disillusion of things that hurts so frightfully."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning life," she said. "Love, and the joy of things."

"Oh, Lord!" said Julian.

"When I came home from that convent school I was out for joy."

"Oh, Lord!" said Julian again.

Janet seemed to be annoyed by that repeated exclamation.

"Why not? I was made for it. Why was I born pretty if it wasn't to be loved? Why was I brought up to like jolly things, nice frocks, dancing, good-looking boys, all the

fun to be had, and then denied everything, and have it all snatched from me? It isn't fair. It's unfair. Life's nothing but trickery. I've been tricked all the way round!"

Julian had once cried out against the unfairness of things. He too had said, "It isn't fair!"—not long ago. He could understand this sister of his. She was going through the same agony of disappointment with the fraud of young illusions, childish dreams of life, and rage against the unfriendliness of things.

Janet spoke bitterly again.

"I fell in love with Cyril and he played about with me and then bunked off with that cat Evelyn. Was that fair? How am I going to pick myself up after that?"

"There are other men—more decent!" said Julian.

"How am I going to know?" she said. "What proof shall I have that another man won't play the same rotten game?"

"They're not all Cyrils, thank God!" said Julian.

"They've all got the Cyril streak," said Janet. "Except you, old boy!"

Julian laughed at that, and then was serious again.

"Perhaps even I!" he said gloomily.

"Besides," said Janet, "the fun has gone out. It's not the same now. Poor old Daddy is lying at death's door. I expect I shall have to be a shorthand clerk or something. All the gay times I looked forward to were just a silly dream, and I'm waking up to the fact that life's a miserable, melancholy fraud. Far better not to be born, old boy!"

Julian was sitting in a chair before his sister's dressing-table and he took one of her silver-backed hair brushes and polished it on his knee in an absent-minded way. There was not a thing that Janet said which he had not said to himself, with equal bitterness. Even as far as that "better not be born!" But he had got beyond that mood. Something had changed in him. He had got beyond his weakness with Evelyn, his rage at life's unfairness, his morbid pessimism. Perhaps it was merely the health of his body restoring the balance of mind. Or perhaps it was Audrey's

sense of humour that had helped him, or Henry Caffyn's kindness. Anyhow he was not hoisting the white flag any more.

There seemed to be some purpose in life of which he was a part. Ambition, or service, or sacrifice,—he didn't quite know, but anyhow he was going to play the game, wherever it led. How could he get that idea into Janet's head?

"Look here," he said, "I understand all that. I've been through it. But I'm out on the other side, old girl. I'm seeing daylight ahead. You're wrong about the fraud of life, I think. It's we that were fraudulent."

"We?" Janet was rather astonished by that point of view.

"Why, yes," said Julian. "We thought ourselves so jolly superior to the rest of humanity. We were so stuck up with ourselves. We didn't expect the ordinary knocks that come to most people. We were Superior People, highly educated, very refined, utterly sure of ourselves, contemptuous of the Old People, and their fears about us, and their cautions. We were the Younger Generation, out for a good time, with lots of rights and no duties, and all for liberty and adventure. Sheltered from vulgarity and passion, and able to take risks which scared our preposterous parents! . . . In fact we were utter frauds, and rather caddish. Pretty selfish. Conceited kids! . . . Well, we've had our heads knocked together. We've been taken down a peg or two. . . . That's all right. It'll do us a bit of good. Anyhow, I'm damned if I'm going to whine!"

He got up from Janet's chair and faced her with a friendly smile.

"For Heaven's sake, don't whine, old girl. That's feeble. I'm rather a believer in facing up to knocks. If we can't do that there's no good in us. We're just traitors to our own crowd. Young rotters. . . . And somehow I believe it's up to the younger crowd to do a big job of work in the world. We can't do that if we show the white feather at the first bump in the road. . . . Of course I'm talking a lot of rot and all that, but you see what I mean? Playing the game, with a bit of tradition behind it!"

Janet was looking at him queerly, with a faint smile about her lips, and flushed cheeks.

"Where did you learn all that?" she asked, with a touch of her old sarcasm.

"Worked it out for myself," said Julian, with a laugh that was rather shy. "Anything in it?"

"It sounds fine!" said Janet, with a look of mockery.

But it seemed to do her good, all the same. Next day, when they moved from Gorse Hill and left so much beauty behind—the gardens were in their glory—it was Janet who sat next to her stricken father and held his hand as he lay back on cushions in a hired car and groaned because of this tragic leave-taking of this house which he had built in the days of success.

"All gone," he said. "Finished!"

Tears trembled on his eyelids and rolled down the stricken side of his face.

"Not finished yet, Dad," said Janet. "We're only beginning!"

She was beginning to play the game.

XLII

IT was an evening in June of this year 1923, when no more may be written of young lives whose further history is not yet chronicled in the mystery of the years to come. Saturday, June the 23rd, to be precise, and a day of hot sunshine after months of grey skies, cold winds, and rain that turned to sleet on London pavements.

The windows of the Perryams' house in West Kensington were wide open and sheltered from the glare of the sun by light curtains stirred by a little breeze. The Perryams were in a street of tall stucco-fronted houses which had been freshly painted here and there by people who had a lucky margin beyond the Income Tax and the cost of life's necessities—perhaps one in four as Julian reckoned on his way to the Underground. His mother's house was not one of them, and the stucco was cracking badly. But he had hopes that they might afford a bit of paint if his novel caught on.

It was to celebrate the birthday of his first novel—"Heirs Apparent" he called it, with the younger crowd as its theme—that he had arranged a little party that evening after supper. He couldn't afford a supper party to such a bunch of friends with hearty appetites out of his weekly salary on *Verity* and advance royalties—fifty pounds!—on a novel that had not yet had its first review. There would be lemonade and sandwiches, and half a bottle of whiskey for the men, and chocolate éclairs for the girls. Audrey had not lost her love for those sticky delights which she used to consume so heartily in Fuller's of the Cornmarket. Janet also had a sweet tooth.

Anyhow, what did it matter? They hadn't come to eat and drink. They came to celebrate the publication of a novel in which quite frankly, and with full permission, he had put all their portraits—Clatworthy—a Peer of the Realm, now that his father had died!—Stokes Prichard,

learnèd in the Law and even better educated in the Art of Life, Mervyn, Burnaby, Frank Nye—just off to Canada with his shy wife—and several other odd types, including Vivian Harshe, who had once been a victim of dope and now by some miracle of faith was a respectable City Clerk, doing well in a merchant's office and no longer afraid of the bottomless pit. He was rather "gone" on Janet and hadn't a dog's chance because Stokes Prichard had all the running now.

When Julian came home for the evening party, Janet and Prichard were on the balcony among the marguerites in flower pots which were Mrs. Perryam's substitute for the glory of the gardens at Gorse Hill. They waved hands to him, and Prichard shouted a "Cheerio!"

Soon there would be no need, thought Julian, for Janet to serve in a hat shop in Sloane Street. Prichard would have a first-class salary after another year in his uncle's office. They had arranged to wait till then before getting married, though Prichard was impatient and groused outrageously at this postponement of Paradise. Janet was not impatient. She seemed perfectly happy to be engaged, to have Prichard dancing attendance on her, to go to all the theatres with him. They made a pretty couple in the dress circle as Julian sometimes looked down on them from the gallery, where he went for economy's sake with Audrey Nye. People turned to look at that boy with the crinkly hair—so pleased with himself!—and that girl like Columbine before the end of Carnival. There was no fretfulness in her eyes now, no shadow of trouble. She had wiped out the Cyril episode. . . . Well, that was one burden less to Julian, one fear less.

Some of the others were assembled in the drawing room upstairs when Julian arrived late for his own party because of an article which had to be written in a hurry. Clatworthy was there, with Mervyn and Burnaby. They had the gramophone going, and Mrs. Perryam was playing a game of "Demon" with old Grandfather, who hated being beaten by a woman for whose intelligence at cards he had but faint respect, though he acknowledged her artfulness.

Mr. Perryam was standing in front of the fireplace, talking to Vivian Harshe, not showing much sign of his long illness except when he moved about the room, leaning on his stick and dragging his left leg rather painfully.

Julian's arrival was gretted by a cheer from the younger crowd.

"Author! Author!" shouted Clatworthy, as though at the first night of a new play.

"Sorry to be so infernally late!" said Julian, blushing deeply because of that novel of which he was immensely proud between spasms of humility and destructive self-criticism.

Stokes Prichard came through the French window with Janet.

"Look out for libel actions, old boy," he said to Julian. "I can bring twenty men to swear that they recognise a most offensive caricature of my blameless character thinly disguised under the name of Sturton Potts."

There was a howl of laughter from Clatworthy and the others.

"There's only one idiot who could quote such an endless stream of poetical bilge!" said Burnaby.

"Sturton Potts!" said Prichard, pretending to be huffed, perhaps a little annoyed in real earnest. "Potts! . . . Now if you had called me Pervical, or Pollard, or Pitt, or Parker. But Potts! It's an outrage."

"As for me," said Clatworthy, "I'm undone. How can I enter the House of Lords with grace and dignity when the very policemen at the gate will expect me to make a monkey face? How can I become Ambassador in Paris when the hall porter at the Foreign Office reads a novel revealing my utter ignorance of the whereabouts of Czecho-Slovakia? It has blighted my diplomatic career at the outset."

"Nobody's going to read the rot," said Julian. "And anyhow I grossly flattered the whole crowd of you, as you must admit. I have even suggested that Stokes Prichard has something resembling a brain under his golden ringlets."

"Putting on one side for a moment my own claims for moral and intellectual damages," said Stokes Prichard, "what I object to in this preposterous work of fiction is the assumption that the younger crowd is not vastly superior to its immediate predecessors."

"Hear, hear!" said Janet. "Julian has lowered our prestige in the eyes of the world. He has made a ridiculous defence of Early Victorianism. He has bolstered up the tyrannical claims of the Old People upon the liberties of youth."

Yes, she had forgotten the Cyril episode.

"On the contrary," said Julian, "I've tried to point out the obvious truth that we're no better and no worse than all the younger generations that have ever been born since the Stone Age. I've declined on our behalf the responsibility which the Old People want to thrust on us, the task of cleaning up the mess they've made. We haven't the experience, and it's still their job."

Mr. Perryam was listening from his place by the mantelpiece, with a smile about his white lips.

"I agree with Julian. As one of the Old People, I think we have asked too much of Youth. We expect the boys who won the War—and their younger brothers—to make a new heaven and a new earth out of the frightful heritage we've bequeathed to them. That's unfair. All the same I believe they will—in another twenty years or so when they take command."

"Ah!" said Clatworthy. "When I'm Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that poor old mug-wump Curzon will be thrust into the shadows of eternal oblivion. I'll show the world the picture of dignified statesmanship!"

Viscount Clatworthy made a face so astoundingly like Lord Curzon in one of his more sublime moments that the whole company was dissolved in laughter with the exception of Julian's grandfather, who solemnly put a King of Spades on the Queen of the same suit, and said to Mrs. Perryam, "My game, I think!" with the light of triumph in his old eyes.

It was into the laughter caused by Clatworthy's "face"

that Audrey Nye came in with her brother and her brother's shy-eyed wife.

"Greeting, merry gentlemen!" said Audrey. "Let nothing you dismay."

She was in her shabby office frock, having had no time to change, but Clatworthy's eyes paid her his usual homage, as he kissed her hand with the gallantry of Sir Walter Raleigh and the absurdity of Leslie Henson.

"When do we start that piano-organ?" he asked, in reference to some ancient jest.

Audrey said "Good luck to the book!" to Julian, and for a moment their eyes met and then avoided too close an understanding.

Frank Nye had grown a beard. He thought it would keep his face warm at forty below zero in Calgary. It would also save the expense of a safety razor. His wife sat next to Mrs. Perryam, holding her hand, and her eyes followed her husband about with a watchful smile like a young mother with a small boy who was always up to mischief, and adorable. She was looking forward to Canadian life.

"Aren't you afraid of the loneliness?" asked Janet.

"Not with Frank," she answered and then laughed and said, "He makes a house full!"

They seemed to be happy with each other, by some merciful fluke of luck, against all chances.

The sandwiches and éclairs were produced, with the lemonade and whiskey. Stokes Prichard sang one of his songs, and then another, with a chorus. It was the beginning of a musical evening.

Clatworthy and Julian talked under the cover of this noise.

"I've just come back from Florence," said Clatworthy. "Had a marvellous time."

"Good!" answered Julian.

Clatworthy looked at him searchingly.

"I met a ghost. A lady ghost. She asked to be remembered to you from the tomb of ancient history. In fact she sent you her very dear love."

"Good heavens!" said Julian. "Whom do I know in Florence?"

Then he guessed, and flushed painfully.

"Yes," said Clatworthy, watching him. "Evelyn Iffield. As pretty as ever, and as merry as ever. But not quite so dangerous. More settled."

"That's all right," said Julian. "I don't want to know. I've forgotten her."

Clatworthy was silent for a moment.

"There are one or two things you ought to hear," he said. "I promised to tell you."

"No," said Julian. "Thanks very much. All that's wiped out."

Clatworthy nodded, and took a sip of whiskey.

"I know. Sorry to reopen closed books. It's a mistake, mostly. But in this case it's due to the lady and might make you feel better about things. She's still Mrs. Iffield. The Major is living with her in Florence."

"What!"

Julian spoke the word sharply. It rather spoilt one of Prichard's high notes.

"Yes. Funny thing. Rather good on the whole. That night she went away—you remember?—the fellow Buckland missed meeting her, owing to a motor smash or something. He was driving his own car. Drunk possibly! He crossed over the next day and followed her to Paris. But she was mad angry. Who wouldn't be? Rather a let down! . . . Well, I don't know details, of course. Anyhow she had a first-class row with him and sent him to the right about. Pretty lucky for her! Then came that charge against old man Buckland—and his trial, and all that. Master Cyril was a convict's son, poor devil! I don't blame that up against him. Well, to cut it all short, Mrs. Iffield lived alone in Florence, and came to her senses a bit. Rather an escape, eh? In the nick of time. Then her mother-in-law died. It seemed to make a difference. Mothers-in-law do, I'm told, by George Robey. So now there she is with the Major again, very bobbish and perfectly pleased. . . . And she sent you her dearest love."

"Much obliged," said Julian in a hard voice.

"Thought you'd like to know," said Clatworthy. "Here's luck to the book, old boy!"

Julian liked to know, in spite of that "Much obliged" so hard and scornful. He was glad about that escape. He remembered as a kind of nightmare that evening she had gone away, his wanderings in the streets, his attempts to get in touch with her—or with Major Iffield. Then he had crept back to his rooms and prayed—actually prayed!—for a miracle, or something. Well, the miracle had happened. That motor smash! . . . He was glad for her sake. For his own sake it did not matter very much. He had worked out a different scheme of life.

He got on with that scheme a little when Clatworthy joined Stokes Prichard at the piano and added to the noise of another chorus.

It was hot in the room. Audrey seemed to find it warm too.

"Let's take a breath on the balcony," he suggested.

Out on the balcony among the flower pots with the marguerites they stood hand in hand, looking down into the drab street where the lamps shone in a purple dusk.

"How long have we got to wait?" he asked. "I'm getting impatient."

Audrey stroked his hand.

"It's worth waiting, isn't it? Two years, three years, five years!"

"Of course we can't afford it yet," said Julian. "Now your governor's out of a job again!"

"And you with your people to keep," said Audrey.

They were silent for a while, standing there with clasped hands.

Julian spoke again, hopefully.

"Janet will be getting married soon. That will ease things a bit. She's rather expensive—in spite of that hat shop in Sloane Street. Then the mater is beginning to earn something. That typewriting!"

"All the same," said Audrey, "our little home is rather remote. This appalling poverty!"

She laughed and put his hand to her lips.

"Never mind, Julian! As long as we keep the flag flying. You and I are rather important people, and we're doing rather well for our age! Shining examples of virtue and sacrifice. Who says Youth isn't facing up to life?"

There was a gust of laughter in the room inside, and the excitement of some new arrival. Julian and Audrey went in from the balcony.

Henry Caffyn had just arrived, in the middle of a chorus which suddenly broke away into laughter as he entered.

He stood there smiling on the company—the elderly Don Quixote, with his pointed beard and upturned moustache and shrewd grey eyes.

"A gathering of the younger crowd!" he said. "Singing ribald songs while the world rocks to ruin. Careless of Germany in dissolution, France arranging the end of Europe, Russia waiting for the world revolution, and England pretending that nothing has happened—with a million out-of-works. What do you care? You're not worrying!"

"Not in the very least!" said Clatworthy. "Let the dance proceed!"

"Won't you have a whiskey, sir?" asked Julian.

"I certainly will," said Henry Caffyn. "I've a toast to offer."

He raised his glass, and his bright eyes looked from one face to another—to Clatworthy, Prichard, Mervyn, Burnaby, Frank Nye, Audrey, Janet, and Julian.

"Here's to the Heirs Apparent," he said, with a friendly tilt of his glass to Julian. "May you soon come into your kingdom. . . . Youth's all right!"

THE END